RENAISSANCE

**HIGHLAND WARRIORS**
How Scottish Lairds kitted up for battle

WWI

**ZEPPELIN COMMANDER**
Eyewitness testimony from the skies over London, 1915

WWII

**THE DAM BUSTERS**
Taylor Downing reviews one of the greatest of all war movies

# MILITARY HISTORY

www.military-history.org

MONTHLY

May 2013 | Issue 32 | £3.95

# THE END OF THE BEGINNING

## Alamein, Tunis, and the turning of the tide

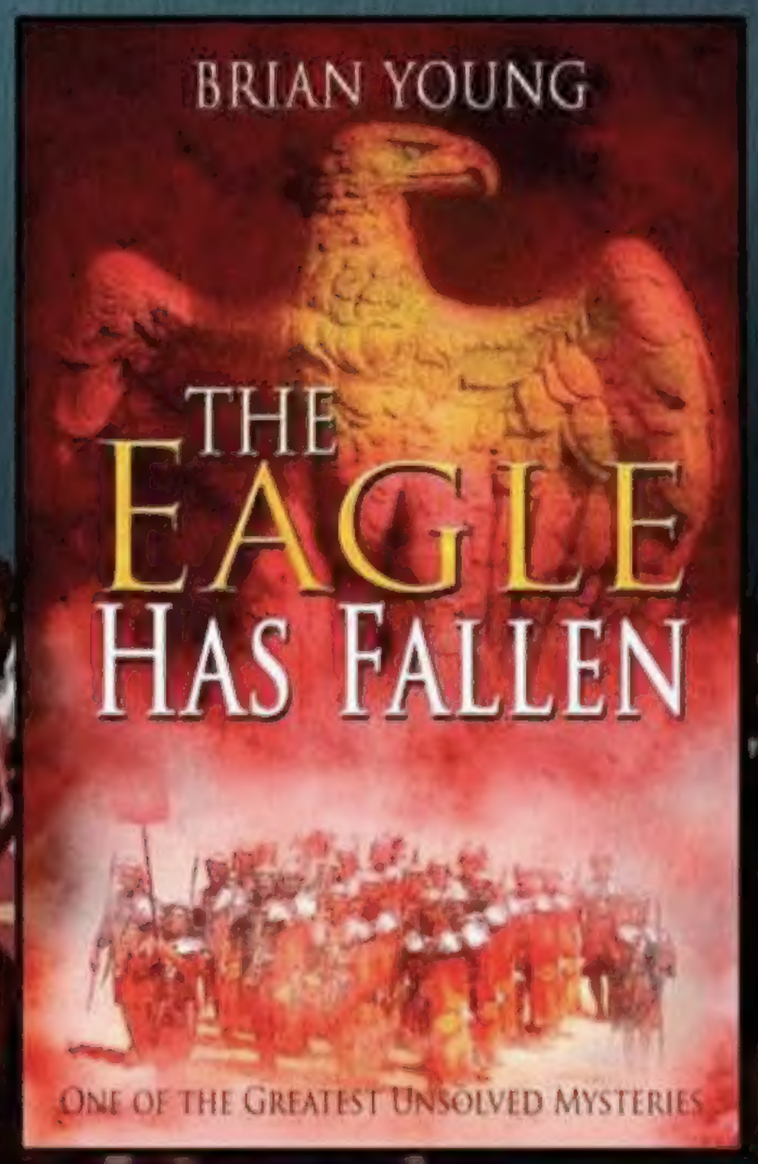

9 772048 410004 05

# THE EAGLE HAS FALLEN

For 2,000 years the secret of Rome's missing Ninth Legion has been shrouded in mystery, its ultimate fate argued over by generations of historians.

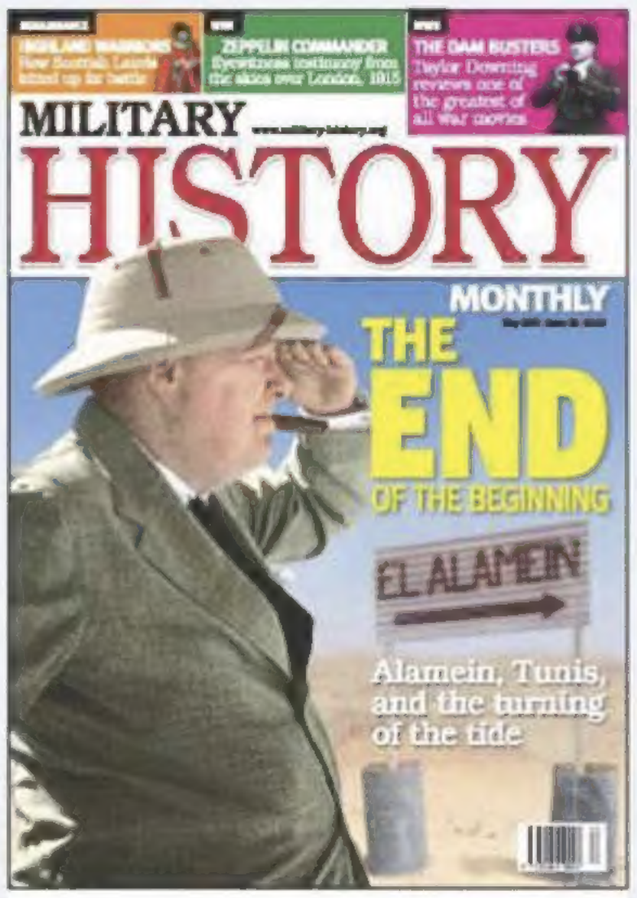
The loss of an entire Legion - numbering around 5000 men - has spun variously from a catastrophic defeat to an almost supernatuaral "mass vanishing".

The Eagle Has Fallen is an unravelling of that mystery




www.eaglehasfallen.com

SPQR




**ON THE COVER:**
Winston Churchill wearing sun helmet, viewing the Alamein postition, 1942.

**Photo** Imperial War Museum Collections

# Welcome

**By Dr Neil Faulkner**

The Second World War was never a single conflict. What began as a European civil war evolved, at the end of its first year, into a confrontation between the British Empire, supreme at sea, and the Nazis, dominant on land. In the middle of 1941, it changed again, as Eastern Europe was engulfed by a titanic and primeval struggle between Teuton and Slav. And only at the end of that year did it go global, when Japan launched an offensive in the Far East that immediately brought the USA into the war.

By the time it ended, the Second World War had become a struggle for global domination between two emergent superpowers – the US and the USSR. Many of its later acts – the 'Big Three' conferences at Teheran, Yalta, and Potsdam; the race to Berlin; the dropping of atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki – turned out to be the opening moves of a new 'Cold War'.

So when Churchill spoke of 'the end of the beginning', he was expressing a very British view. Alamein was indeed the end of the long 'beginning' before the might of Russia and America began to tell. Once it did, victory was virtually certain – but so too was the eclipse of the British Empire. Alamein, in a sense, was the last hurrah of the greatest of the old European empires.

But Britain's war was important in other ways. A people's war, it could be won only by mass mobilisation and collective action. Because of this, victory meant not just the destruction of Fascism, but also a new contract between state and people based on economic intervention and social reform.

We explore the great turning-point in Britain's war with complementary articles on Alamein and 'Tunisgrad'. Also in this issue, Ross Cowan analyses warfare in the Scottish Highlands in the 16th and 17th centuries, Roger Howard reveals how Nazi scientists designed missiles for the Arabs in the 1960s, and we take a close look at the experience of First World War Zeppelin crew in the first of our new occasional series looking at the combat experience.

Neil Faulkner.

## Who we are:

*Military History Monthly* aims to cover conflict on land, at sea, and in the air through all periods of history, with expert commentary written in an intelligent and accessible way.

Editorial Advisory Board:
**Martin Brown** Archaeological Advisor, Defence Estates, Ministry of Defence, **Mark Corby** Former Army Officer, military historian, lecturer, and broadcaster, **Paul Cornish** Curator, Imperial War Museum, **Gary Gibbs** Assistant Curator, The Guards Museum, **Angus Hay** Former Army Officer, military historian, and lecturer, **Nick Hewitt** historian, Research and Information Office, Imperial War Museum, **Nigel Jones** historian, biographer, and journalist, **Alastair Massie**, Head of Archives, Photos, Film, and Sound, National Army Museum, **Gabriel Moshenska** Research Fellow, Institute of Archaeology, UCL, **Colin Pomeroy** Squadron Leader, Royal Air Force (Ret.), and historian, **Michael Prestwich** Emeritus Professor of History, University of Durham, **Nick Saunders** Senior Lecturer, University of Bristol, **Guy Taylor** Former Army Officer, military archivist and archaeologist, **Julian Thompson** Major-General, and Visiting Professor, Department of War Studies, London University, **Dominic Tweddle** Director-General, National Museum of the Royal Navy.

## Let us know what you think...

We would love to hear your opinions on this issue of the magazine. What are your favourite bits? What should we cover next issue? You can give us your feedback:

**By Post:**
*Military History Monthly*
Lamb House
Church Street
London W4 2PD

**By Phone:**
020 8819 5580

**By Email:**
feedback@
military-history.org

**Online:**
www.military-history.org

**On Facebook:**
Military History
Monthly Magazine

# Contents

## FEATURED


**14** History of the British Army

**Alamein, 23 October-4 November 1942**

By October 1942, the British Army had the equipment, training, and doctrine to fight a modern war. For the British, Alamein signified 'the end of the beginning'.

ON THE COVER

**24** Tunisgrad

**Desert war, 1943**

Chris Bambery reassesses the end of the Axis occupation of North Africa.

**32** Frontline

**Airship against AA guns**

Launching a new occasional series of first-hand accounts of war, *MHM* analyses the testimony of Kapitänleutenant Joachim Breithaupt, a young naval officer who commanded Zeppelin L15 during WWI.

**44** Lairds of Battle

**Scottish Highlanders**

Ross Cowan argues that the tartan-clad Romantic icon of the Highlander has had a longer life on shortbread tins than in reality.

**52** Egypt's Missiles

**Operation Damocles and Nasser's Nazi rockets**

Roger Howard looks at the military friction caused by President Nasser's 1957 rocket programme.

# May 2013

## EVERY ISSUE

## Dispatches


Welcome 3

News 6

Opinion 8

Your Military History 10

*MHM* selects seven of the best international battlefield tour operators and picks out their highlight tours throughout Britain and across the world.

## On Manoeuvres


Listings 62

*Military History Monthly*'s summary of the best events coming up this May.

Museum 64

David Flintham crosses the Channel to explore the Pegasus Bridge Memorial Museum.

Warzone 66

Keith Robinson reports from Meaux, the site of First Battle of the Marne on 5-12 September 1914.


## Reviews


DVD 72

Stephen Dorff stars as a captured Israeli pilot shot down over Lebanon in a new film from Eran Riklis.

TV 73

The best upcoming films and documentaries on the new history channel, H2.

Books 74

Neil Faulkner reviews Taylor Downing's new book examining the making of renowned TV documentary *The World at War*. Plus, Mark Corby recommends Saul David's *All the King's Men*.

## Regulars


War on Film 40

Marking the 70th anniversary of the actual raid, Taylor Downing reviews classic war-movie *The Dam Busters*.

Drawing Board 82

Daniel Sager examines the Dreyse Needle Gun's limitations.

*MHM* Quiz 80

This month we have three books and three DVDs of Eileen Younghusband's *One Woman's War* to be won. Enter the *MHM* Quiz to be in with a chance of winning one of each.

MILITARY HISTORY MONTHLY

***Military History Monthly***
**Issue 32, May 2013**
*www.military-history.org*

**EDITORIAL**
**Editor:** Neil Faulkner
neil@military-history.org

**Assistant Editor:** George Clode
george@military-history.org

**Editor-at-large:** Andrew Selkirk
andrew@military-history.org

**Sub Editor:** Simon Coppock

**Art Editor:** Mark Edwards
mark@currentpublishing.com

**Designer:** Justine Middleton
justine@currentpublishing.com

**Managing Director:** Rob Selkirk

Lamb House, Church Street, London, W4 2PD
**Tel:** 020 8819 5580

**COMMERCIAL**
**Advertising Sales Manager:** Mike Traylen
**T:** 020 8819 5360 **E:** mike@currentpublishing.com

**Advertising Sales:** Grace Biggins
**T:** 020 8819 5361 **E:** grace@currentpublishing.com

**Marketing Manager:** Emma Watts-Plumpkin
**T:** 020 8819 5575 **E:** emma@currentpublishing.com

**Production Manager:** Maria Earle
**T:** 020 8819 5587 **E:** maria@currentpublishing.com

**Commercial Director:** Libby Selkirk

**SUBSCRIPTIONS**
**UK:** £36.95 (12 issues) **RoW:** £46.95 (12 issues)
**Back issues:** £4.50 each / £5.50 non-UK (inc p&p)
**Binders:** (hold 12 copies) £15 / £20
**Slip Cases:** (hold 12 copies) £15 / £20

***Military History Monthly* Subscriptions**
Lamb House, Church Street, London, W4 2PD
**Tel:** 020 8819 5580 **Fax:** 020 8819 5589
subs@military-history.org
www.military-history.org/subscriptions

**NEWS DISTRIBUTION**
**UK & Rest of World:** COMAG, Tavistock Road, West Drayton, UB7 7QE **Tel:** 01895 444 055

**Printed in England by William Gibbons**
*Military History Monthly* (ISSN 2048-4100) is published monthly by Church Street Publishing Ltd, Lamb House, Church Street, London, W4 2PD



© Church Street Publishing Ltd 2013
All rights reserved. Text and pictures are copyright restricted and must not be reproduced without permission of the publishers. The publishers, editors and authors accept no responsibility in respect of any goods or services which may be advertised or referred to in this magazine. Every effort has been made to secure permission for copyright material. In the event of any material being used inadvertently or where it has been impossible to contact the copyright owner, acknowledgement will be made in a future issue. All liability for loss, disappointment, negligence or damaged caused by reliance on the information contained within this publication is hereby excluded. The opinions expressed by contributors are not necessarily those of the publisher.


MEDIA PIONEER AWARDS COMMENDED 2011

*Military History Monthly* has been commended by the Media Pioneer Awards. For more information visit:
**www.thespecialistmediashow.com**

# DISPATCHES

**Our round-up of this month's military history news stories.**

## BURMA SPITFIRE MYSTERY CRACKED

Global video game company Wargaming.net has announced they believe their team has solved the mystery of the 'buried Spitfires of Burma'.

In autumn 2012, Wargaming engaged a world-class group of geophysicists, historical researchers, and archaeologists to travel to Yangon International Airport, the former RAF Mingaladon, to 'ground-truth' the legend of the lost Spitfires.

A previous independent study of documentary sources in the UK failed to produce any evidence to support the arrival or the burial of crated Spitfires. But it did find extensive evidence of surplus aircraft having been scrapped *in situ* or passed on to third parties.

Witness testimony, however, suggested that servicemen in bars and canteens of South-east Asia had heard rumours about buried Spitfires as early as 1946. But no-one had actually seen the burials taking place.

As the project's Lead Archaeologist Andy Brockman explained, 'We wanted to investigate the legend of the lost Spitfires. Ultimately both we on the research team and Wargaming.net, who gave us a completely free rein to follow the evidence, realised that archive work, however comprehensive, was not enough. We could only solve the mystery by also investigating it on the ground in Burma.'

In January 2013, the team began fieldwork at former RAF Mingaladon, now the site of Yangon International Airport.

The geophysics team, led by Dr Roger Clark of the University of Leeds and Dr Adam Booth of Imperial College London, surveyed more than 52,000 square metres of Yangon International Airport to a depth of up to ten metres.

After the geophysics, the team conducted a detailed landscape survey of the site, using period documents, plans, and air photographs to reconstruct the layout of the airfield as it had existed in 1945 and 1946. Four trenches were dug. In each one, WWII-era aretfacts were unearthed less than three metres below the ground.

The Wargaming team now believes, based on clear documentary evidence, as well as the evidence from the fieldwork, that no Spitfires were delivered in crates and buried at RAF Mingaladon during 1945 and 1946.

Most significantly, the archival records show that the RAF unit that handled shipments through Rangoon docks – 41 Embarkation Unit – only received 37 aircraft in total from three transport ships between 1945 and 1946. None of the crates contained Spitfires, and most appear to have been re-exported in the autumn of 1946.

The documents tell of appalling weather conditions at Mingaladon, and shortages of everything from heavy equipment to timber and labour. This suggests that it would have been almost impossible for the RAF to have buried aircraft 30 feet deep in wooden crates, even if it had wanted to.

Andy Brockman noted: 'We approached the project as a *CSI*-style police procedural looking for alleged missing persons: the Spitfires. We followed the clues in the documents, period maps, pictures, and air photographs. We talked to surviving witnesses, and visited the 'crime scene' in order to turn our study in the archives into facts on the ground. As a result, we believe that the legend of the buried Spitfires of Burma is just that: a captivating legend about a beautiful and iconic aircraft.'

# Memorial plans unveiled

Grangemouth Spitfire Memorial Trust has revealed the site plans for a much-anticipated full-size replica of a Mark 1 Supermarine Spitfire, scheduled to be officially unveiled on 9 May 2013 on Bo'ness Road, Grangemouth.

This extraordinary memorial will commemorate the trainee Spitfire pilots from around the world who learned to fly the legendary aircraft at the beginning of World War II, and the 71 trainee pilots who lost their lives while practising daring manoeuvres in the aircraft at RAF Grangemouth. The countdown to the imminent unveiling reached fever pitch with this release of official site-plans and images.

The project, which has received £100,000 worth of funding from a number of different bodies, including the 1333 (Grangemouth) Squadron ATC, will see the replica Spitfire erected at a specially built site.

Iain Mitchell, chairman of the GSMT, said, 'It's been a long time coming, but we are finally at a stage where we can share our wonderful plans with the public. The young men who trained at Grangemouth were among the bravest the world has ever seen, and it is a huge honour for us to be in a position to commemorate their sacrifice with this stunning memorial.

'I can confirm that the aircraft is in the area at the moment undergoing some final preparation ahead of the big unveiling on 9 May. It is the first of its kind in Scotland and we cannot wait to share it with everyone.'

Men from Poland, Holland, the former Czechoslovakia, Belgium, Canada, USA, Australia, New Zealand, Ireland, and India were among those who trained at the then state-of-the-art Grangemouth facility.

The money was raised over a period of five years, which saw 1333's cadets take part in a variety of fund-raising activities, such as bag-packing, street collections, and delivering on behalf of local companies. Money was also donated by the Falkirk Environment Trust and EB Scotland.

VIPs will attend the unveiling, which will commence at 11am. Entry to the Grangemouth Spitfire Memorial Trust is free of charge.

# NEWS IN BRIEF

## HERO RIDE

Paralympic silver medallist Jon-Allan Butterworth joined fellow Help for Heroes Ambassadors Lorraine Kelly, Peta Todd, and four wounded veterans to launch Hero Ride, the charity's latest fund-raising challenge, in Horse Guards Parade – with the most iconic bike in history: a penny farthing.

Hero Ride, taking place on 2 June 2013, will see cyclists from around the country stage fund-raising bike rides, meeting *en masse* in Blackheath to ride together into central London in support of Britain's wounded soldiers. The aim is to raise over £2 million. The funding will provide support to those who have suffered injuries in recent conflicts and their families.

## THANKFUL VILLAGE VISIT

This summer, Royal Commission staff-member Medwyn Parry and co-rider Dougie Bancroft will undertake a motorbike journey to all 51 'Thankful Villages' in the UK. These are villages where there is no war memorial because all of those who went to fight in the Great War returned home alive.

The trip starts at Llanfihangel y Creuddyn, near Aberystwyth, on 27 July 2013, and will finish at the same point nine days and 2,500 miles later. Those who live in Thankful Villages are hugely proud of their status. Medwyn and Dougie plan to meet residents, especially descendants of those who returned from WWI.

Medwyn Parry has been amazed by the outstanding generosity of complete strangers who have embraced the spirit of the project. The aim is to raise £51,000 for the Royal British Legion. As far as he is aware nobody has visited all 51 villages in one journey.

## PLACEMENT SCHEME A SUCCESS

Great enthusiasm has been shown for the Military Work Placement Scheme, launched last November to fund companies to provide nearly 1,000 work placements to ex-forces personnel into 2013. The government-funded scheme was formally launched at the Imperial War Museum with employers, military representatives, and Stephen Hammond MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport, in attendance. The current ratio of 30% job offers to placements is a significant endorsement of the scheme by employers. Jobs range from senior directors, through operations management, to driving.

Mick Jackson, CEO of Skills for Logistics, commented, 'We are seeing fantastic enthusiasm for the MWPS following its formal launch. We have received... over 2,000 registered placements. Employers clearly want to get involved... and have access to the excellent resource offered by men and women leaving the armed forces.'

# SUPPORTING THE TA

Afghanistan veteran **Jake Wood** discusses the dual nature of life as TA soldier, the effect on one's health, and how it led him to write a book.

**Above** Twenty Taliban KIA at Bagar Keyl.

When I was a young boy, I hero-worshipped my father, an RAF pilot, and my grandfather, a multi-Military Cross-decorated, double-World War army veteran. My mother had been in the Army too, and my aunt, and my uncle, and my cousin. I was nurtured in a family that revered achievement in the military world. And as the eldest of two brothers, I put a lot of pressure on myself not to let them down.

I had a stammer. Not a mild speech impediment but a strangling, vocal-cord-clenching disability that would leave the other kids in fits of giggles or groans when I had to read something out in class. Whether the stress I caused myself trying so hard to achieve led to my stutter I will never know, but in later years I would reflect that it certainly compounded it.

The more frustrated I became with my inability to speak and socialise with my peers, the more my stammer clamped down on me, shutting me off from them.

I found escape in the company of books during these lonely formative years. In doing so, I began to learn the value and power of the written word. I saw that long-dead voices from the past could become ever-living. I saw these authors' voices and lives resurrected on the page in front of me in fluent verse as they brought their stories alive in my mind.

The more I read and learned language, the more I began to write stories of my own. At first, this was just schoolwork for my ever-patient and encouraging English schoolmaster. But then I began writing just for myself.

I found I could express myself in ways I could never have done vocally. At first writing simply provided me with a means to exercise my child's imagination. But as I grew older, I began to use these words to reflect the world around me. I soon learned that I could use writing to make my way in the world, armed with nothing but a raw determination to rise beyond my childhood impediment.

> I felt the debased siren song of war calling me, from some far-off land called Helmand.

## Military addiction

I was serious about proving myself in the military world. What I could not know, however, is that when I did begin to push myself, the Army would repay me with such a wealth of burgeoning self-confidence that my childhood stammer would fall away.

I spent many years in a Territorial Army (TA) Special Forces unit after graduating from university, before moving to London and transferring to another TA unit, the Honourable Artillery Company (HAC). The Army became a mandatory foil to my civilian life, a dichotomy that many TA soldiers will no doubt recognise. But then, early in 2003, everything changed.

I played my frontline part in invading a country. When I came home and returned to my office at an investment bank, while everything else was just the same, I realised that I had changed radically.

In 2004 I returned to the world which now made more sense to me, and whose

moral code of daily living seemed far more elevated, than anything I saw in banking. I spent a year away from the office, with six months of it spent conducting covert surveillance on Iraqi insurgents. It is testament to the bonds that the HAC can engender between people that some of my best friends are those with whom I served on that Iraq tour.

I was hooked on this other-worldly existence. Back in London, in the summer of 2006, I felt the debased siren song of war calling me from that far-off land of Helmand.

I answered this call. In the summer of 2007 – 'fighting season' in Afghanistan – I fought and I killed and I saw soldiers I respected killed alongside me.

Then, in 2008, it was back once again to the world of banking. And as the banks' excesses continued whirl around me, I was enduring a personal whirlwind of my own.

## PTSD

An eminent psychologist specialising in Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) would later tell me of the higher occurrence of PTSD in reservist soldiers, due to the double-lives they have to lead. He told me how the risk of this occurrence is dramatically increased if the soldier has killed, and that it is when we are suddenly re-immersed in the cosy norms of civilian life that greater meaning is attached to the things we have done. And he told me how feelings of abandonment only exacerbate the resulting PTSD.

These insights have comforted me by making me feel a shade less mad. But I still have to live with 'survivor guilt' and 'killer guilt'. In my nightmares, the past of Afghanistan lives on in me. And as PTSD has taken rule in my mind, those familiar old traces of childhood stammering can again be heard in my voice.

**Above** Back from Inkerman.

The latest research and my own experiences suggest that the markedly higher occurrence of PTSD in TA soldiers is down to the fish-out-of-water experience a TA soldier will have. One day you are in Afghanistan, and then the next you are suddenly thrust back into your old civilian life. This split has always run through a TA soldier's training life, but it becomes all the more sharply defined when he or she returns from somewhere like Afghanistan.

Regular Army soldiers return to a military environment at home after an operational tour. They 'decompress' (to use diving parlance) together for months with the people they fought with, within a barracks. The TA soldier will never have that. After a few weeks' leave, they go straight back to their civilian lives.

## Support unit

Aside from their partners, family, friends, and colleagues, this makes support from the soldier's TA unit especially important. Their TA unit is their 'regimental family', and should be a place where they can always go and feel able to talk with like-minded people, sometimes even people they have served abroad with.

It also goes without saying that TA soldiers should have exactly the same access to MOD medical services that regular soldiers have. Unfortunately, this is not always the case, at least at the moment. I received some very good psychological treatment from the Army, but it is also true to say that other doors were shut in my face, just because I was a demobilised TA soldier.

The Army's 'Future Reserves 2020' programme highlights the unique challenges TA soldiers face. The TA is set to double in size, and play an even larger role in future Army operations abroad. These servicemen and -women will need appropriate support when they come home, not just from the Army, but from the population they return to live among.

We are not after praise or sympathy. Some of us just need some patient understanding and support as we try to readjust to life back home. But as part of this, I would also ask for recognition for all those young men and women who must do terrible things so very far away from here, all to keep this 'home' – this idyll we always look forward to returning to – safe.

**Below** The Hill – aka Sparrowhawk West.

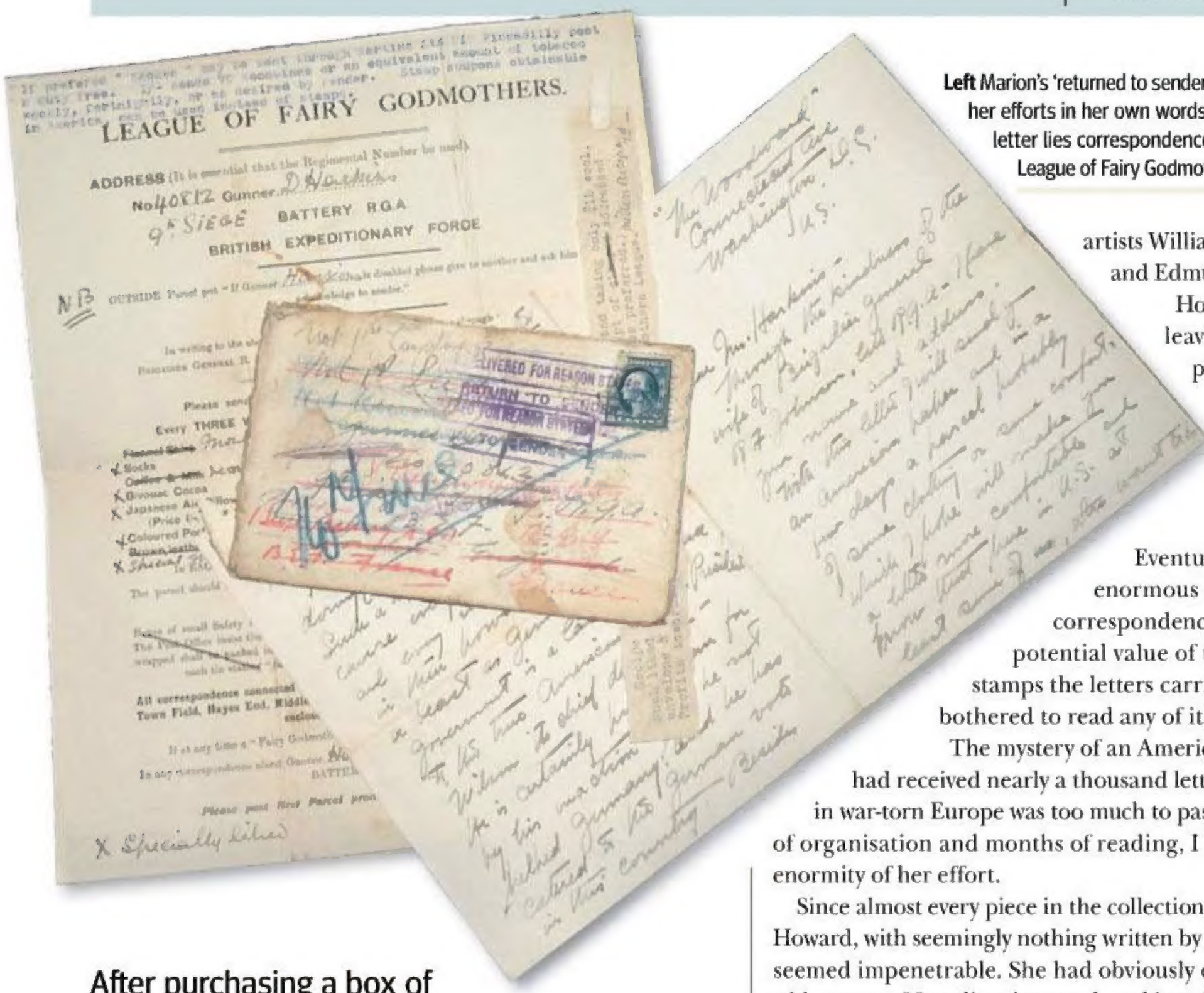
## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

The new book by **Jake Wood**, *Among You*, is out now, from Mainstream Publishing, £14.99
ISBN 978-1780575728

# THE AMERICAN FAIRY GODMOTHER MYSTERY

**The human touch:** stories of war and conflict from readers of *MHM*.

**Niles J Laughner** is a freelance writer specialising in the intersection of military and social history.


LEAGUE OF FAIRY GODMOTHERS.
ADDRESS (It is essential that the Regimental Number be used)
No40812 Gunner D Hawkins
9th SIEGE BATTERY R.G.A
BRITISH EXPEDITIONARY FORCE
NB
RETURN TO SENDER

**Left** Marion's 'returned to sender' letter, showing her efforts in her own words. Behind the letter lies correspondence from the League of Fairy Godmothers.

After purchasing a box of WWI letters, **Niles Laughner** discovered the extraordinary story of one American woman's bid to help the Allied war effort.

America's entry into the Great War is legendary – though perhaps more for its tardiness than its immediate effect. This is especially true in Europe, where the US contribution is seen more in terms of finance, equipment, and sheer numbers of soldiers potentially available than actual combat victories.

While the US remained neutral from August 1914 until April 1917, this was not true of all its citizens. Countless American citizens found ways to contribute to a cause in which they believed intensely. In many cases, this effort has gone unrecorded or unnoticed.

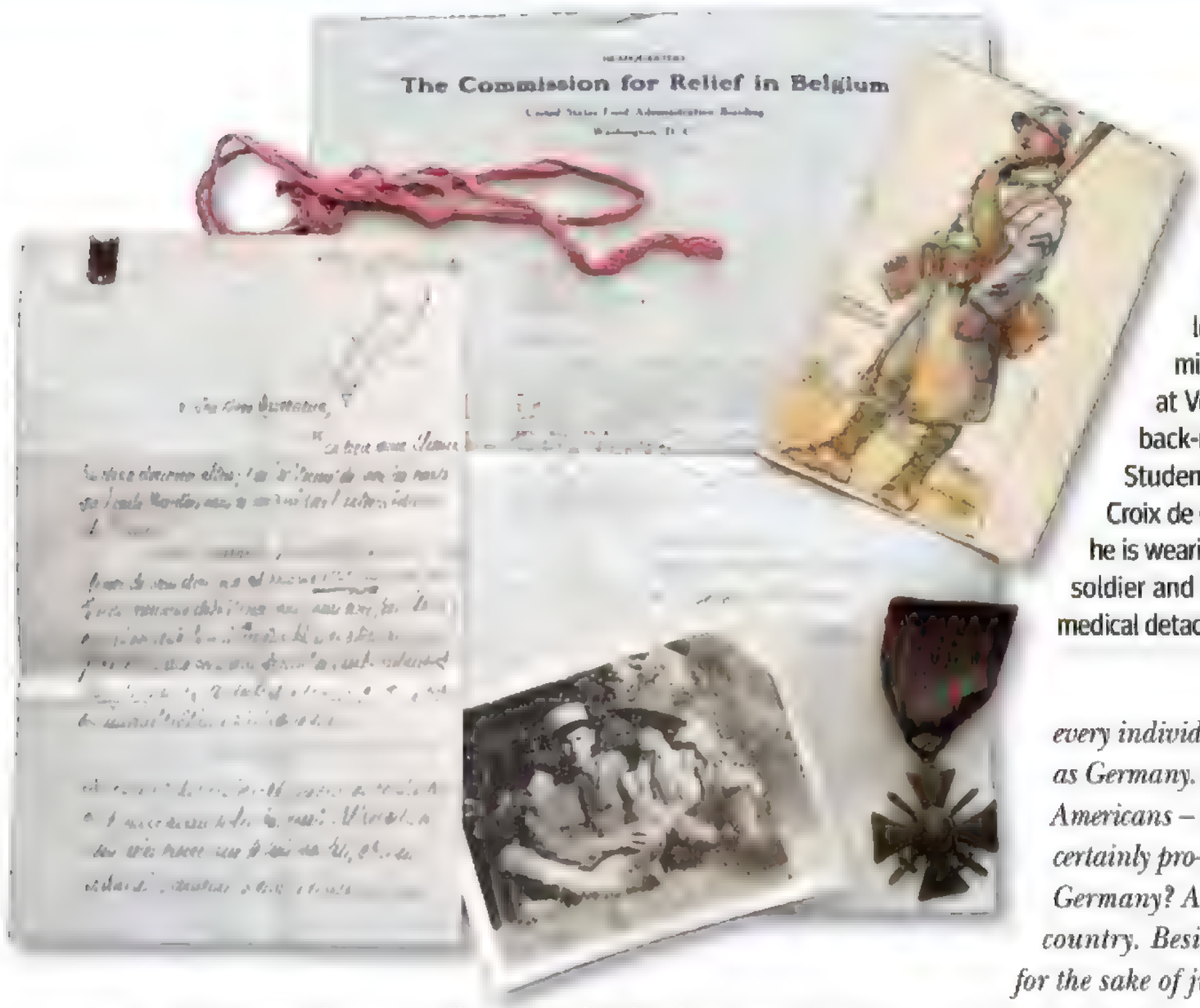
One of the many unsung heroes of American pre-war involvement was Marion P Howard. She came from a wealthy Massachusetts family, and was born in 1883. She did not follow the path that Victorian society offered to women. Instead, she learned to paint under respected American Impressionist artists William Merritt Chase and Edmund Tarbell.

Howard died in 1953 leaving no heirs. Her possessions were passed to her nephew, and from him to further extended family. Eventually, in 2010, her enormous archive of WWI correspondence was sold for the potential value of the exotic foreign stamps the letters carried. No-one had bothered to read any of it.

The mystery of an American woman who had received nearly a thousand letters from soldiers in war-torn Europe was too much to pass up. After weeks of organisation and months of reading, I discovered the enormity of her effort.

Since almost every piece in the collection was to Marion Howard, with seemingly nothing written by her, the mystery seemed impenetrable. She had obviously corresponded with scores of frontline, interned, and imprisoned soldiers, eventually sending gifts, photographs, postcards, and even

**Below** Corporal Ronald Lebrun, the machine-gunner at the left, was the only survivor from this photograph taken at Passchendaele. Marion also wrote to wounded soldiers in hospitals, and men held in PoW camps.




**Left** Many of Marion's letters were discovered bound up in small groups with pink ribbons as shown. The letter written in French and the Belgian Relief letterhead both relate to Marion's attempts to locate a town (Sart-Risbart, Belgium) in pursuit of a missing soldier; a hand-coloured print of a 'French Soldier at Verdun, 1916', sent as a gift to Marion Howard, with back-marks indicating it as an original from the American Students Committee at the École des Beaux-Arts, Paris; the Croix de Guerre medal was a gift from the American Volunteer, as he is wearing it in another photograph; a snapshot of an American soldier and an American Volunteer, likely attached to a French medical detachment – the men have switched hats for the photo.

money to them. Occasionally, she had helped support their impoverished families at home.

Who was this woman, and what was her solitary mission? Was the answer hiding innocently inside an unopened letter?

## Marion's boys

Posterity owes a debt of gratitude to the BEF postal service. Howard's first letter to 'Gunner D Harkins, 9th Siege Battery, Royal Garrison Artillery, BEF' failed to find its intended recipient, and was returned unopened after a long journey. As I sliced open the top of the envelope, I wondered what it might contain, what secrets these words, not seen since 1917, might reveal.

What they showed was a feisty mind, and a keen sense of duty; a woman who was determined to do her best to help others and represent her nation, whether the nation wanted her to or not. Here is Marion Howard in her own words:

*Dear Mr Harkins,*
*Through the kindness of the wife of Brigadier General R F Johnson, I have your name and address. With this letter, I will send an American paper and in a few days a parcel, probably of some clothing or some comfort, which I hope will make you a little more comfortable and know that here in the US, at least some of us want to do what they can to cheer you brave men who are fighting for the civilization and humanity of the whole world.*

*Perhaps I better tell you a little bit about myself so you can have an idea who I am, for it must be rather strange to receive a letter from a stranger. How will I begin? At the first of the war, I worked for the Belgian Relief, sewing, cutting, packing boxes, any work that was needed. Then as I wanted to do something for the soldiers, a friend of mine, an English girl, gave me a few names of soldiers to send articles to. So now I have 37 in all and sometimes I feel like the old woman in the shoe who had so many children she didn't know what to do. But, it's the only way I can fight Germany, to do what I can for those who are. Most of my soldiers are Belgians for they are separated from their people and their lot is a sad one.*

*I wish I could say [the] US was doing her duty as are the Allies. Such a war as this should cause every nation of honor and every individual to do all in their power to crush such a beast as Germany. Our government is a lasting disgrace to us true Americans – and President Wilson our chief disgrace – he is certainly pro-German for by his inaction, has he not helped Germany? And he has catered to the German vote in this country. Besides our not fighting to crush such a beast for the sake of justice, we do not fight or take any action for our own sake…*

*… If there is any special article I can send you that you want, please ask me, for you will do me a favor.*

*How am I able to do for 37 soldiers – I decorate for a gift shop and also sell decorated articles myself. As I do not have to earn my own living, I can do this and use all the proceeds.*

*It will take almost a month to receive a reply from you, but may this find you well and safe and may the Boche be driven back further every day. If they could only be crushed without loss to you!*

*All my best and sincere wishes to you and all your Tommies, good luck! I wish I could have gone over and been a nurse.*

*Best Wishes again, your American Friend,*
*(Miss) Marion Howard*

This letter was contained in an envelope nearly covered, front and back, with postal directions and cancellations. It was finally returned to Marion unopened. She must have imagined that her letter had arrived too late to help, since any letter returned to sender unopened during wartime suggests the worst. To my relief (and probably Marion's), a letter from Harkins to Marion turned up dated 4 April 1917, just before the US entry into the war, confirming Harkin's receipt of a second letter and a package.

**April 5, 1917**
*Dear Miss Howard,*
*Just a few lines to let you know that I have received your letter and parcel all right… I suppose you will think me ungrateful for not writing you sooner but we don't get much time out in France* ▷

**Right** Canadian machine-gunners dig themselves in, using shell holes on Vimy Ridge. Marion's list of correspondents included Belgian, British, Scottish, and Canadian troops.

**Above** A street corner in Poelcapelle, Belgium, 1918. It is clear from her letters that Marion intended to visit Belgium and England after the war, and meet all of her correspondents in person.

*for pleasure just at present. I see by the papers that your country is trying there* [sic] *best to get at Germany, good luck to you. I hope to see the stars and stripes waving in France before very long.*

*You were wanting one of my photos, well I am sorry that I haven't got one at present and we can't get one taking* [sic] *while we are in the firing line but I might get a chance of going back for a rest and then I will send you one. I think your photo is very nice and I have always carried it with me when in the trenches. My present address is Gunner D Harkins (40812) V/I Trench Mortar Battery, 1st Divisional Artillery, British Exp. Force, France.*

*… Hoping to hear from you soon again, from yours sincerely D.H.*

## The League of Fairy Godmothers

Marion Howard seems to have got Harkin's name and address from an organisation called the 'League of Fairy Godmothers'. It operated exclusively for the benefit of soldiers serving in the Royal Garrison Artillery, and was based in Hayes, Middlesex. The form that accompanied the Harkins letter suggesting him as Marion Howard's 'pen-pal' gave detailed instructions as to which items were especially useful to British soldiers, and what should not be sent. Another letter from the League noted that:

*The Royal Garrison Artillery (Heavy, Siege, and Mountain Batteries), being recruited from the whole Kingdom, have no local societies to look after their interests, as is the case with infantry regiments.*

*From letters received there appears to be a mistaken idea that the League only deals with the cases of 'lonely soldiers'. This is not so, for all are fighting for us, and all are cheered by personal interest, while the relations and friends of many cannot afford to send gifts.*

Marion's list of correspondents included men in the trenches, in hospitals, in PoW camps, in Dutch internment camps, and at home after being wounded beyond further use to the Army. About 75% were Belgian, and the remainder were British, Scottish, and Canadian. Some men wrote a single return note. Some sent postcards and little gifts. However, a few entered into a correspondence that stretched on into dozens of letters, and occasionally more.

Oscar Cost, a Belgian soldier from the 27th Regiment, 7th Brigade of the 2nd Division, is a good example. He was interned at Camp de Zeist, a Dutch internment facility, for the duration, after being forced to evacuate Antwerp and flee to Holland or risk becoming a PoW of the Germans. Holland was neutral in World War I, and maintained these camps to house soldiers who strayed into their territory, often on purpose. In the first of over 60 letters, Cost could barely speak English. By the end of the war, he was fluent in English, and had related all aspects of internment-camp life, from the daily routine to the salary paid by the Dutch Government to each internee based on his camp job.

Not surprisingly, Cost was a financial analyst for a Belgian steel company before the war. He liked numbers and detail, and took delight in relating all of it to Marion. Cost sometimes enclosed rings, pins, and other souvenir items made in the internment camp for Howard, who sold them and returned the money to him at Camp de Zeist.

From the responses of many of her boys, it is apparent that Marion intended to visit Belgium and England after the war, and meet them all in person. No-one knows if it happened. Once the end came, it would have been understandable if people had stopped their war-time work and gone back to their lives, trying to forget or at least move beyond the trauma.

Marion Howard does not appear to have been involved in anything political again. Her time was occupied with artwork. Her distant relatives only knew that there was a painter in the family long ago, an eccentric woman who never married. That carried implications in the 1950s and 1960s that were usually left unspoken.

Her war-work was forgotten, and her correspondence was shifted from box to box, finally being tossed into a banana crate and sold for the value of the stamps. Marion Howard has survived in the words of 78 men who daily saw the worst mankind could offer, but whose burden was lightened by an eccentric New England painter whom they would never meet. It is appropriate that Marion did not advertise her own work. She did it because she was inspired to help, out of human compassion and political conviction.

Perhaps in Belgium or Middlesex her name is a part of family lore – and the other half of this amazing story, in her own hand, is stored in the attic!

**Inset** Marion's painting of Mount Kearsage from the New Hampshire Museum. Next to it is the following caption: 'Pictured is our most recent acquisition, a rare painting of Mount Kearsage by Marion Howard (1883-1953). Marion Howard is an artist that the gallery has been researching and actively acquiring works by for the past five years. She is one of the leading female artists in New England during the first half of the 20th century. She studied with New Hampshire artist Edmund Tarbell and then was a resident of New Hampshire for much of her adult life.'

# Entente Cordiale Battlefield Tours

we go to Look, Experience and Remember*

Entente Cordiale Battlefield Tours have developed themed tours to key destinations in Europe as a personal tour for families or groups of friends or colleagues who prefer to travel independently, and also battlefield journeys for larger groups, including school parties too!

## In the Footsteps of....

The Early BEF – The Retreat from Mons
Harry Patch "the Last Tommy" – Ypres, Passchendaele & Poperinge
The AIF Australian Sites including Fromelles
The Canadians – Vimy Ridge & The Somme
Kitchener's Pals – The Somme and Arras
The Americans
Victory – The Last Months

"The personalised treatment we received right from the initial contact, the planning, meeting our specific requirements, and the tour itself were excellent!"
Mary and Jim

For more information and booking details
Call 01244341920
or visit
www.ententecordialetours.co.uk

# Waterloo Battlefield tours to fit your plans

A British ex-pat living close to the battlefield, guides battlefield tours for small groups or individuals, covering the three-day campaign, covering:

- The Wellington Museum at Waterloo
- The Lion Mound
- Combat zones at Waterloo, Plancenoit, Quatre Bras & Ligny
- Hougoumont château
- Napoleon's last bivouac at Le Caillou

## I offer:

- Pick-up & drop-off at your hotel or railway station.
- Any duration from 4 hours to 3 days
- Hotel & restaurant reservations
- Five-seater mono-space vehicle standard, bigger hired on request.

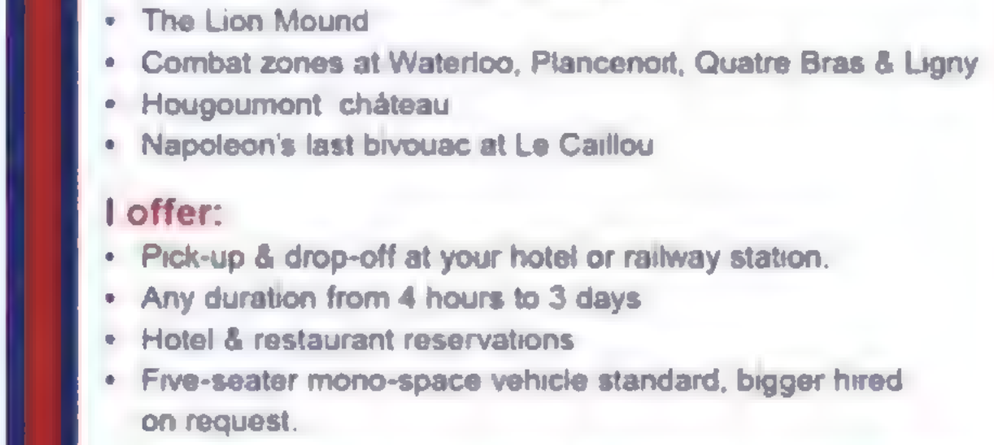
Contact me with your dates, times and any particular interests, and I'll send you a detailed proposal

**Alan Lindsey**

e. alanlindsey1@gmail.com
w. www.waterloobattlefieldtours.com
t. + 32 10 41 08 40
m. + 32 475 616 646

# THOMAS GUNN

AVAILABLE DIRECT FROM US AND FROM ALL GOOD QUALITY TOY SOLDIER STOCKISTS THROUGHOUT THE WORLD.



BRITISH INFANTRY ZULU WAR

A7 GERMAN WWI TANK

FRENCH FOREIGN LEGION

WWI BRITISH ARMOURED CAR

WWI GERMAN PILOTS

RNAS WWI ARMOURED CAR

1/30TH SCALE

Thomas Gunn Miniatures 67 Market Place, Warminster BA12 9AZ UK
Phone: 0044 1985 219472 - Fax: 0044 1985 216105
www.tomgunn.co.uk - welcome@tomgunn.co.uk

1/30TH SCALE

A History of the

# BRITISH ARMY

IN 25 BATTLES

## ALAMEIN, 1942

# ALAMEIN, 1942

An 8th Army Tommy advances to take the surrender of German tank crew during the 13-day Battle of Alamein in October-November 1942

**Right** Lieutenant-General (later Field-Marshal) Bernard Law Montgomery (1887-1976), commander of the 8th Army at the Second Battle of Alamein.

A History of the BRITISH ARMY IN 25 BATTLES

ALAMEIN, 1942

# ALAMEIN

## 23 October-4 November 1942

**It was neither a big battle by Second World War standards, nor the military masterpiece Montgomery claimed it to be. But Alamein was, for the British at least, 'the end of the beginning' – the event which demonstrated that the British Army now had the equipment, training, and doctrine to fight a modern war.**

'Before Alamein we never had a victory,' proclaimed Britain's wartime prime minister. 'After Alamein we never had a defeat.'

Neither statement was literally true, though perhaps they seemed so. From May 1940 onwards, Britain had suffered a long succession of unprecedented defeats – in Norway, France, the Western Desert, Greece, Crete, Malaya, and Burma. Singapore had fallen in February 1942 at a cost of 130,000 prisoners, and Tobruk in June with the loss of a further 30,000.

Fighting to defend the homeland, the Middle East, and the Far East; fighting also an increasingly desperate maritime battle to keep the sea-lanes open; and fighting a growing strategic bombing campaign because it was, at the time, the only way to strike directly at the enemy heartland – fighting, that is, on five widely separate fronts – the British Empire found itself hopelessly overextended. Meantime, its Soviet allies were still fighting with their backs to the wall, and its US allies were only slowly beginning to bring their weight into the scales.

### A special relationship

Not the least of it was the effective bankruptcy of the British state, which had become entirely dependent on US finance and supply. The masters of 'an empire on which the sun never set' were increasingly despondent. After the loss of Singapore, the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, General Alan Brooke, confided to his diary that '[i]f the Army cannot fight better than it is doing at present, we shall deserve to lose our Empire.' The following year, the British Commander-in-Chief in the Far East, Field-Marshal Wavell, told Churchill that 'the repressive force necessary to hold India after the war would exceed Britain's means'.

The US, of course – 'the arsenal of democracy', as President Roosevelt described it – had its own reasons for providing Britain with the sinews

**Right** FDR: Franklin Delano Roosevelt (1882-1945), 32nd President of the United States, in office from 1933 to 1945, and the only three-term president in US history. Roosevelt is photographed here having just signed the US declaration of war in December 1941 – the culmination of a year and a half of growing support for the British war effort.

Images: WIPL

of war, and then intervening itself in the Western Theatre; and these reasons were unwelcome in London. The US was emerging from interwar isolationism and seeking to construct a new global hegemony to facilitate the expansion of American capitalism. The old European empires were to be dismantled in favour of free trade. America's burgeoning wartime economy was to be sustained after the war through access to international export markets. Consequently, Nazi Germany, Fascist Italy, and Imperial Japan were not the only threats to the British Empire – there was also the US, brash, booming, and all set to remake the world in its own interest.

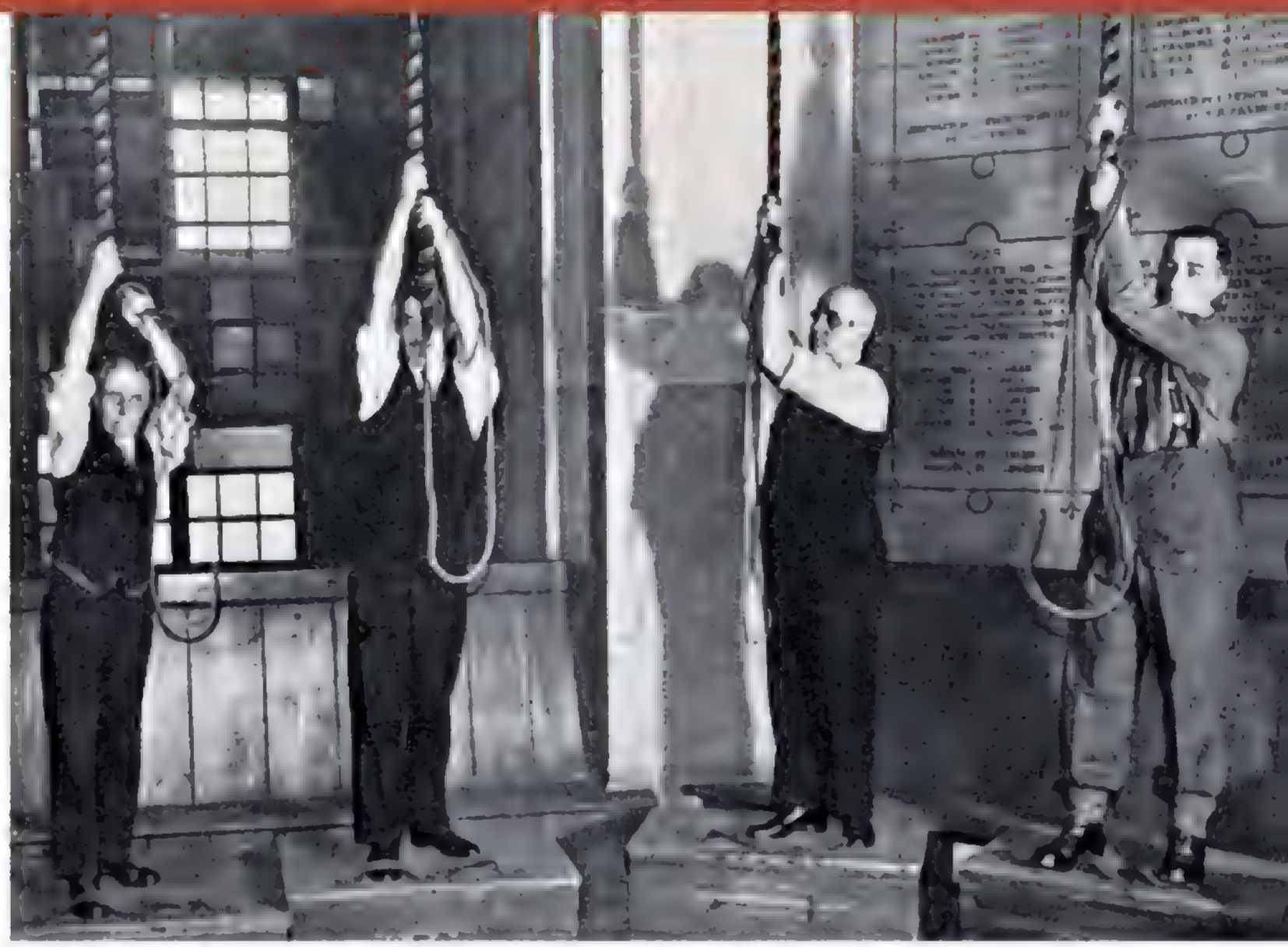
American forces would go into action for the first time in the Western Theatre in November 1942 as part of a massive Anglo-American invasion of North Africa. There were to be major landings at Casablanca, Oran, and Algiers, with subsidiary landings further east. This force would mop up any Vichy French resistance in Algeria and Tunisia, and then strike hard at the rear of the Axis forces facing the British 8th Army in the Western Desert. Rommel's Afrika Korps would be crushed between two giant millstones.

Churchill wanted a clear-cut British victory before this could happen – a victory that would substantiate the British Empire's continuing claim to a seat at the international top-table.

## A new experience

Nor was this Churchill's only problem. The succession of military disasters, the increasingly radical mood at home, and the growing sense that 'the old gang' was to blame and 'the vested interests' had to go, had brought low the stock of the Churchill government. Though the Prime Minister had easily survived a confidence vote in the House of Commons after the fall of Tobruk, he was considered vulnerable, especially were there to be another defeat in the Western Desert. 'If Alexandria had fallen,' wrote Labour MP Ivor Thomas, 'Winston would have fallen also. As it is, he will hold his position until we get another major reverse…'.

Much hinged, then, on the victory duly won by Lieutenant-General Bernard Montgomery, the new commander of the 8th Army, in early November 1942. When news of the victory reached Britain, the church bells were rung and the Prime Minister announced that 'we have



**Above** 'A new experience': the victory bells are wrung for Alamein. A second-division win in the league table of World War II as a whole, but an event of profound significance for Britain and the Churchill premiership.

a new experience: we have victory – a remarkable and definite victory.' He continued: 'Now this is not the end. It is not even the beginning of the end. But it is, perhaps, the end of the beginning.'

It was indeed, for the British, the great turning-point. In the grander scheme of things, it was a small victory. 'Alamein cannot rank', argued historian of the British Army Correlli Barnett, 'with Blenheim or with Waterloo, nor even with Salamanca or Vittoria. Those were triumphs over principal field-armies of the great European enemy, while Alamein was a victory over a minor German expeditionary force.'

At Alamein (technically 'Second Alamein' to distinguish it from an earlier battle in July 1942), Montgomery faced four crack German divisions (50,000 men) and eight third-rate Italian ones (55,000 men). In the 13-day battle, Rommel lost 50,000+ of these men in killed, wounded, and captured. At the same time, on the Eastern Front, the Russians faced approximately 150 divisions and some three million men. During the five-month Battle of Stalingrad (late August 1942-early February 1943), they inflicted around a million casualties on the German Army. Alamein and Stalingrad are events of a completely different order. The comparison reveals the centrality of the Soviet war effort to the outcome of the Second World War.

## An army fit for purpose

For Britain and its Army, however, Alamein was of huge significance. It demonstrated that, in the context of a war waged alongside powerful allies, with the Soviets fighting the bulk of the *Wehrmacht* on the Eastern Front, and the US supplying the finance, *matériel*, and manpower to open new fronts in the West, the British could contribute battle-winning armies. The Blimps had been vanquished. The armed forces had been re-equipped, re-trained, and re-motivated. A mass wartime Army of citizen-conscripts that was fit for purpose had finally been constructed.

Problems remained nonetheless, and these were reflected both in the preponderance of force required to win the Battle of Alamein, and in its highly attritional nature. It more closely resembled one of the battles on the Western Front in 1918 than it did the British *Blitzkrieg* achieved in O'Connor's victories over the Italians in the winter of 1940/41. The British could still not match the panache achieved by the Afrika Korps' staffwork, communications, and integration of armour, artillery, and infantry in a fast-moving battle. Tanks and infantry tended to fight separate battles, divisions were large and cumbersome, and command and control over-centralised. Much had improved – thanks largely to Auchinleck's reforms – but the 8th Army was still weighed down by much fossilised interwar tradition.

# ALAMEIN, 1942

The balance of tank power: US-supplied Grants and Shermans meant that for the first time the British Army had tanks that were a match for Germany's Mark III and Mark IV *Panzers*.
**Below** An 8th Army Sherman in action.
**Right** An 8th Army Grant tank on the move.

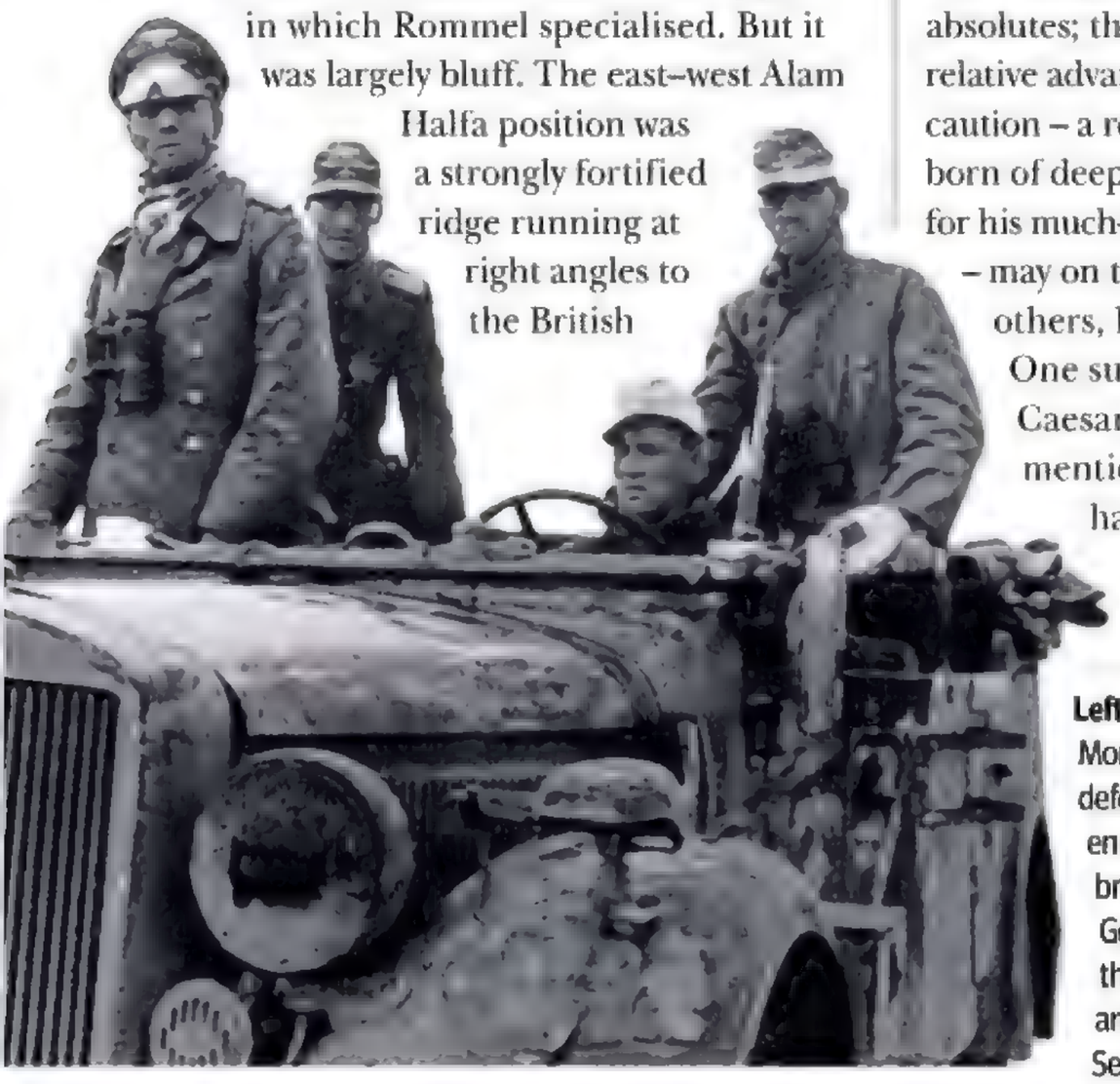
## Alam Halfa

Compounding the problem at Alamein was the fearsomely strong defensive position Rommel had established after his repulse at Alam Halfa two months earlier. In retrospect, this previous battle must surely rank on a par with Alamein itself in significance. It was the highpoint in the third and last of the Axis thrusts towards Alexandria and Suez from the Western Desert; the final occasion on which they might have broken the British line, seized control of Egypt, and imperilled British control of Middle Eastern oil.

The offensive had been the sort of fast armoured punch extending to the furthest limit of reserves and supplies in which Rommel specialised. But it was largely bluff. The east–west Alam Halfa position was a strongly fortified ridge running at right angles to the British front anchored on Alamein. Its possession made it impossible for Rommel to outflank the British line. Instead, he was forced to swing his armour east and north and then launch a frontal attack while at the end of long, vulnerable supply-line. Battered by anti-tank guns heavily dug in, by brigade-strength armoured counterattacks, and by punishing air-strikes, he was forced to withdraw after a week's fighting by unsustainable losses and desperate fuel shortages.

Churchill tried to goad Montgomery into an immediate counterattack. He would not move. He wanted more time to prepare.

Such arguments are never a matter of absolutes; they invariably hinge on the relative advantage of delay. Montgomery's caution – a refusal to take risks probably born of deep-rooted insecurity and fear for his much-vaunted military reputation – may on this occasion, as on many others, have been misjudged. One suspects that Alexander, Caesar, or Napoleon – not to mention Rommel – would not have hesitated. The interim – almost two months – permitted a substantial build-up of force on the British side, and much careful preparation and planning. But it also allowed Rommel the time he needed to construct what was perhaps the strongest defensive line yet seen in the Desert War.



**Left** The Desert Fox confounded. Montgomery fought a Wellingtonian defensive battle at Alam Halfa that ended Rommel's last chance of breaking through to the Nile. The German commander's heavy losses threw him onto the defensive and set the strategic context for Second Alamein two months later.

## Rommel's line

Two things defined the Italo-German position – one natural, the other man-made. The first was the Qattara Depression. Beginning about 40 miles south of the sea, where 700-foot cliffs lined its northern edge, the Qattara was a vast expanse of salt-desert impassable to armies. Military vehicles in particular were unable to negotiate a terrain formed of jagged ridges, fine-powdered sand, and soft salt-marshes. Positioned between the Mediterranean and the Qattara Depression, Rommel's 105,000 men could not be outflanked.

The second factor was a belt of minefields up to five miles deep, extending along the whole of the Italo-German front. Most of the mines were anti-tank – designed to detonate with armour-piercing force when triggered by a heavy weight. But sown among them were anti-personnel mines, placed so that clearance by enemy sappers to create paths for their armour would be hazardous and slow. At best, the enemy would create narrow funnels, at the far ends of which defending tanks and guns could be massed to rain fire upon columns of attackers backed up in the modern equivalent of no-man's-land.

Defending this position, as well as 105,000 infantry, Rommel had 500 tanks ▷

## THE BATTLE OF ALAMEIN, 23 OCTOBER-4 NOVEMBER 1942

1. Attempt to break through on X Corps front (23-25 October), but 10th Armoured Division defeated by German counter-attacks on western edge of minefields.
2. Attempt to break through on XXX Corps front (28-29 October), but 1st Armoured Division also defeated by German counterattacks on western edge of minefields.
3. Renewed attempt to break through on X Corps front (1-2 November) almost cracks German line. Rommel decides to withdraw. Retreat becomes chaotic and costly as British armour finally bursts through into German rear.

# ALAMEIN, 1942

**Above** Dramatic images of 8th Army men attacking German positions at Alamein. The infantry struggle involved hundreds of separate firefights and bayonet charges, as the British attempted to clear the line of German posts covering the minefields.

(though 280 of them were low-grade Italian types), 1,200 guns (including 90 of the superb 88mms), and 350 serviceable aircraft. Against them, by late October 1942, Montgomery was able to deploy 195,000 infantry, over 1,000 tanks (including 170 Grants and 250 Shermans), 2,300 guns, and over 500 serviceable aircraft.

Broadly, Rommel was outnumbered and outgunned by a factor of two to one. What of quality? The skill, experience, and morale of his German troops were in marked contrast to the demoralisation and ineptitude of the Italians. And as the battle was to reveal, some 8th Army men – like the Australians, the New Zealanders, and the Highlanders – could easily now match the Germans in sheer *élan* and grit. The German advantage in equipment was also reducing. The new US tanks, the Grant and the Sherman, were a match for Rommel's Mark IIIs and Mark IVs, while the British 25pdr field-gun was, in its own way, as impressive a piece of battlefield ordnance as the German 88mm anti-aircraft/anti-tank gun.

## Monty's plan

To pin Rommel's infantry and tie down his armour, it was necessary for Montgomery to mount simultaneous attacks along most of the front-line. The critical question was where he should concentrate his main effort – where he should aim to break through.

His plan was as follows: XIII Corps was to make an attack in the south sufficiently strong to distract the 21st Panzer Division and prevent it being moved north; XXX Corps was to launch an all-out attack in the north designed to engage and destroy the enemy infantry on that flank; and X Corps, operating on the immediate left of XXX Corps, was to open routes through the minefields for the main armoured thrust. In accordance with this plan, X Corps was reinforced by huge numbers of sappers for preliminary mine-clearance, and was allocated the bulk of the tank force.

The battle began just after dark at 9.40pm on 23 October with a massive whirlwind artillery bombardment. The fire at first extended along the whole line to obscure the main point of attack. 'Nothing had been seen like it before or after,' recalled veteran gunner Sergeant-Major Harold Harper. 'The entire lot started firing at the precise second and the whole sky seemed to burst.' Then there was a five-minute pause designed to draw the Axis infantry from their dugouts in anticipation of an attack. Immediately afterwards, the deluge of shell-fire was resumed. As it continued, the weight of fire was shifted onto the primary targets.

The sappers and the infantry began moving forwards to clear the minefields around 10pm. This was nerve-wracking work. The sappers had to walk slowly forwards swinging the heads of their metal-detectors and listening in their earphones for tell-tale changes of

**Below** 8th Army sappers advance into the five-mile-wide 'no-man's-land' formed by the German minefields under the cover of a massive British bombardment on the night of 23/24 October.

frequency in the constant hum – amid the roar of the artillery. Others probed with fixed bayonets. The clearing parties were totally exposed, and Axis guns and small-arms were soon taking their toll. 'We'd been told "if a man falls, walk on",' remembered Sid Lunn, a Londoner conscripted into the Highland Division, 'and men starting falling within minutes.'

## The plan unravels

But things did not go according to plan. Though the sappers cleared lanes through the minefields and the infantry – 9th Australian Division, 51st Highland Division, 2nd New Zealand Division, 1st South African Division – carried a succession of enemy posts in a hundred vicious firefights and bayonet charges, the armour could not get through. The lanes were narrow and the exits were covered by concentrations of enemy tanks and AT guns. The waiting *Panzers* and 88s began to take a heavy toll and halted the British advance, leaving the mechanised units backed up in no-man's-land.

The fighting became a terrifying chaos of noise, flying metal, and burning vehicles. John Bain, another Highland Division soldier, imagined himself to be the epicentre of the whole maelstrom: 'All of that shrieking, whining venom is directed at you and at no-one else. You hunch in your hole in the ground, reduce yourself to as small a thing as you can become, and you harden your muscles in a pitiful attempt at defying the jagged, burning teeth of the shrapnel. Involuntarily, you curl up into the foetal position, except that your hands go down to protect your genitalia. Montgomery doesn't protect his privates, but by Christ, I protect mine.'

The night fighting at Alamein was the stuff of nightmares – literally so, for it would live in the minds of the men who survived for decades to come. 'I remember young O'Connell had both legs severed by a mortar bomb and was screaming for help,' reported Lieutenant Derrick Watson, 'and then for his mother before he mercifully died. Major Cooper, who had disappeared from sight when hit, called out at intervals during the day before he, too, fell quiet.'

Perhaps most terrible of all was the fate of men burned to death inside 'brewed-up' tanks. Lieutenant Gillman was lucky to survive when his Crusader was hit. 'The shell, an 88mm I think, came in one side and blew the other side of the turret wide open, killing all the crew except the driver and myself. Being small, I was not sitting in the commander's seat but squatting on it, and that is what saved me. I felt a blow on my leg and fell into the bottom of the fighting compartment, and all the ammo was on fire, so I hauled myself out over the gun, out of the turret – I don't know how – and rolled off into the sand.'

## Days of attrition

The attack of 10th Armoured Division, spearhead of X Corps' intended breakthrough, was halted on two successive nights. So Montgomery shifted his centre of gravity northwards. He ordered 1st Armoured Division to attempt a breakout on the axis of advance cleared by the Highlanders, while the Australians on the right were to continue pushing forwards and 'crumbling' the Axis infantry in front of them. ▷

**Below** A dead Axis artillerymen beside his AT gun. Alamein turned on whether the combination of minefields, AT guns, and *Panzer* counterattacks could prevent a British breakthrough.

This also failed. Rommel, who at the start of the battle had been recovering from sickness at home, now returned to the front and immediately ordered a massive *Panzer* counterattack. This blocked the second British thrust as securely as the first had been.

Alamein, however, was a battle of attrition, not a battle of manoeuvre. It could not have been otherwise. Rommel's flanks were secure. His front was covered by minefields and defended by a continuous line of posts and guns. Behind them were powerful mechanised reserves able to move rapidly and strike hard against any enemy advance. The only way to win was to grind down this defence in hard fighting. Both Axis infantry and Axis armour had to be 'crumbled' before a breakthrough became possible. In practice, this meant repeatedly threatening the integrity of the Axis line, drawing Rommel's *Panzer* divisions into action, and then consuming their strength in fierce firefights as they attempted to stop up successive breaches.

Montgomery contemplated switching his next axis of attack further north again and attempting an armoured punch through positions won by the Australians. But he was persuaded to make one more effort in the New Zealand sector. Launched on the night of 1 November, this attack almost broke the enemy line.

Rommel saw the writing on the wall: the danger now was that Montgomery, with his greatly superior reserves of strength, would break through with the Axis army still in position, such that it might be divided, surrounded, and destroyed piecemeal. As early as the evening of 25 October, the tank strength of the 15th *Panzer* Division had been reduced by three-quarters. By the end of Montgomery's second major thrust on 28-29 October, the Afrika Korps as a whole had only 90 tanks left. Though it had destroyed almost four British tanks for every one of its own lost, the 8th Army still had more than 800 serviceable vehicles – an 11 to one superiority on the eve of Montgomery's third major attack.

'I haven't much hope left,' Rommel wrote to his wife on the evening of 29 October. 'At night I lie with my eyes wide open, unable to sleep, for the load that is on my shoulders. In the day I'm dead tired. What will happen if things go wrong here? That is the thought that torments me day and night. I can see no way out of this business.'

Rommel decided to pull out. As he did so, the breakthrough he feared finally came, as 1st Armoured Division advanced clean through from the salient created by the New Zealanders and threw the Axis withdrawal into disarray.

> You harden your muscles in a pitiful attempt at defying the jagged, burning teeth of the shrapnel.

## Escape from disaster

What followed was chaotic. Montgomery tried to hurl his other two armoured divisions – 10th and 7th (the latter previously deployed in the south) – into the breach behind 1st Armoured. His aim was to cut off the Axis retreat and destroy Rommel's army. But the confusion and congestion were too great as the battlefield dissolved from a solid structure into a mass of moving parts. Although the haul of Axis prisoners was to be 30,000, Rommel got half his army away.

The 8th Army's total casualties in killed, wounded, and missing were 13,500 (about 8%). Axis combat casualties may have been as high as 20,000, in addition to the 30,000 who surrendered, but this is uncertain. Most significant, however, was the virtual destruction of Rommel's *Panzer* divisions. He escaped with only around 20 tanks out of an original force of some 500. It was this attrition that forced him to withdraw, and precluded any sustained stand before he reached the Mareth Line deep inside eastern Tunisia.

Here, despite the Anglo-American 'Torch' Landings, which meant that the Axis forces in Tunisia were caught between the arms of a giant pincer, the campaign stalled again. The overall superiority of the German Army – in equipment, training, flexibility, integration, and doctrine – meant that it was able to sustain resistance until May 1943. The Anglo-American forces paid a heavy price for Montgomery's failure to destroy Rommel's army as it fled down the Libyan coast.

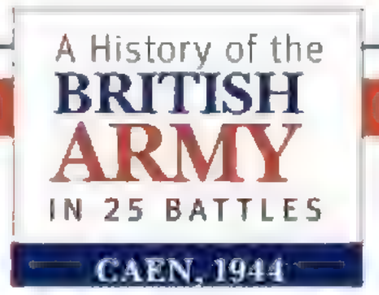
Various explanations have been given. The most risible is the weather. Certainly there was rain and mud in the days after Alamein. But this affected the hunted no less than the hunter. As after Alam Halfa, the suspicion arises that Montgomery lacked the killer-instinct: the grim determination to exploit a victory relentlessly, to drive one's forces forwards to the utter limit of their endurance, to pursue the enemy to his complete extinction. Caution continued to reign. A reputation for success, even 'invincibility', demanded careful choreographing.

Still, Montgomery had created an army of victors, secured Churchill's premiership, and confirmed the deep-rooted conviction of the British people that they were going to win the war. Alamein was indeed 'the end of the beginning'. The British Army had reinvented itself yet again in the fires of war.

**COMING NEXT**

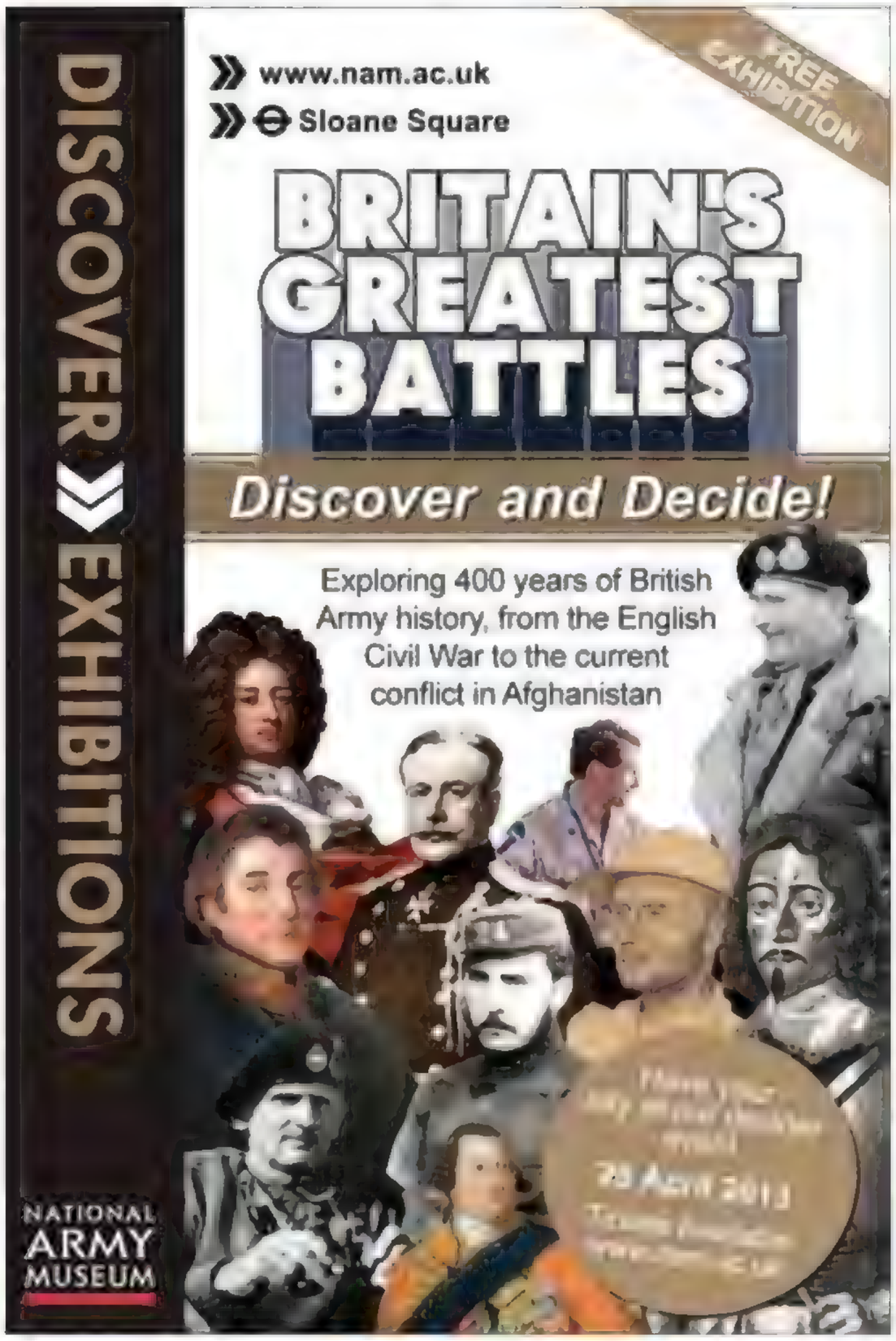
## CAEN

### 6 JUNE-6 AUGUST 1944

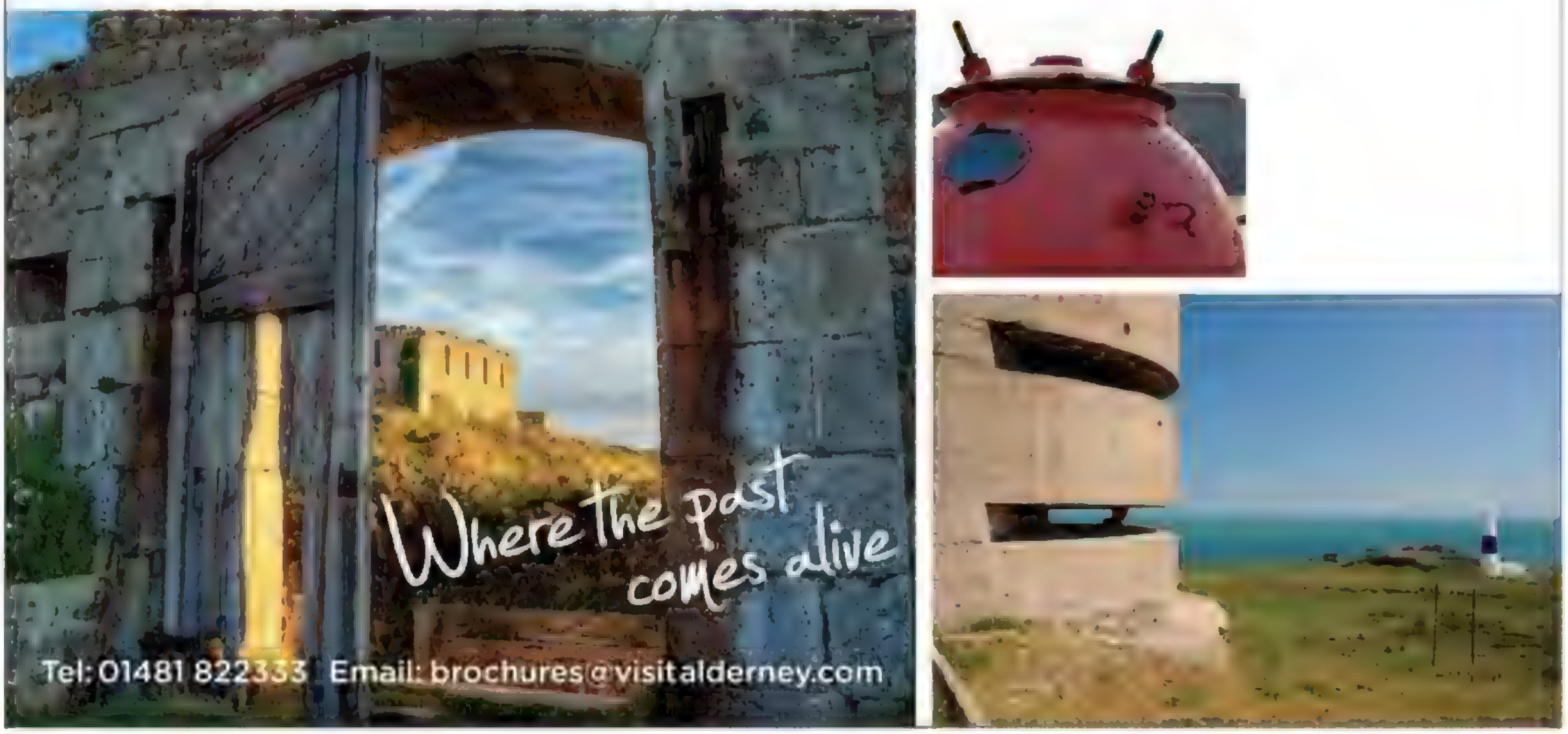



It was supposed to have been captured on D-Day. Instead, Caen turned into a two-month battle of attrition that tested the British Army against the élite Waffen SS. The battle broke German military power in France. When the breakout finally came, Allied armoured spearheads raced all the way to the German border.

**The *Military History Monthly* History of the British Army in 25 Battles is being run in collaboration with the National Army Museum. Our special thanks are due to Alastair Massie, Head of Archives, Photographs, Film, and Sound.**


DISCOVER EXHIBITIONS
www.nam.ac.uk
Sloane Square
FREE EXHIBITION
BRITAIN'S GREATEST BATTLES
Discover and Decide!
Exploring 400 years of British Army history, from the English Civil War to the current conflict in Afghanistan
NATIONAL ARMY MUSEUM

The Battlefields Trust
JOIN US NOW!
Help preserve our battlefield heritage and enjoy:-
• Regular walks, talks and events • A quarterly magazine
• A wide range of members' discounts
Nearly everyone in the UK lives within half an hour's drive of a battlefield.
The battles fought on them helped shape the way we live today. Please join us now and help preserve these priceless historical sites for everyone to understand and enjoy.
The Battlefields Trust usually charges £5 per person for non-members attending their walks. Bring this advert with you and receive a FREE introductory walk.
For more information, a membership application form, or to join online please visit
www.battlefieldstrust.com
Registered Charity no 1017387


Alderney
THE CHANNEL ISLAND
If you like history you'll love Alderney for its Bayeux tapestry section, Roman fort, Elizabethan wrecks, Victorian harbour and World War II embattlements. All on an island less than an hour from the UK.
www.visitalderney.com/mhm
Where the past comes alive
Tel: 01481 822333 Email: brochures@visitalderney.com

# Tunisgrad 1943

**Chris Bambery** sifts fact from fiction as he reassesses the end of the Axis campaign in North Africa.

**Above** I have a cunning plan. Monty explains how he's going to beat the Boche to a group of British officers during the Tunisian campaign.

**Right** A retreating Axis column under air attack during the Tunisian campaign of spring 1943. Hitler's determination to hold Tunisia by rushing in reinforcements meant that the final bag of prisoners surpassed that at Stalingrad.

'Tunisgrad': that was the name German civilians bestowed on the battle to defend the last pocket of North Africa controlled by German and Italian forces in the first five months of 1943. It was, of course, in reference to dreadful defeat at Stalingrad earlier that year.

In terms of the numbers who surrendered in Tunisia, the comparison holds good. In terms of the strategic importance of the campaign, there must be considerable doubt.

In November 1942, as the Second Battle of El Alamein raged, US and British forces landed in French North Africa. Operation Torch led to the rapid seizure of Morocco and Algeria but failed, narrowly, to secure Tunisia, which was promptly occupied by Axis forces.

Field-Marshal Erwin Rommel, the commander of the main Italo-German army in Egypt (consisting of three Italian corps and one German), was in the meantime extricating his men from their defeat at El Alamein. The retreat took them all the way from Egypt, across Libya, to Tunisia, where they finally made a stand.

> New US commanders like Omar Bradley and George Patton took charge, and began forging an effective attacking force.

Rommel's success in withdrawing his forces was facilitated by the failure of the British 8th Army commander Lieutenant-General Bernard Montgomery to exploit fully his Alamein victory and Rommel's lack of armour, air support, and fuel. By the time British-led forces reached the eastern border of Tunisia, strong ground and air defences were in place.

## The defence of the Atlas

It was not Rommel's choice to hold out in Tunisia. After he received news of Operation Torch, Rommel had suggested to Hitler an African Dunkirk, the evacuation of the theatre. The *Führer*, as usual, would countenance no such withdrawal, telling Rommel Tunis must be defended like Stalingrad. Hitler, with Italian dictator Mussolini's compliance, ordered 140,000 Axis troops to Tunisia.▷

Images: © WIPL Colourisation: Ian Bull

**Above** Map of the Tunisian campaign showing the frontline in February 1943.

## TIMELINE

### 1940

| | |
|---|---|
| **10 June** | Italy declares war on Britain and France |
| **13 September** | Italian forces under Marshal Graziani invade Egypt from Italian colony of Libya, but halt shortly after crossing border |
| **9 December** | British and Commonwealth forces launch counter-offensive |
| **16 December** | Egypt cleared of Italian forces |

### 1941

| | |
|---|---|
| **22 January** | Tobruk in Libya falls to British and Australian troops |
| **7 February** | Benghazi captured by British |
| **12 February** | German forces under General Erwin Rommel arrive in Tripoli |
| **17 February** | Winston Churchill orders forces to be transferred from Libyan front to Greece |
| **24 March** | Rommel captures El Agheila in Libya with little resistance |

Before the bulk of Montgomery's 8th Army finally arrived, Axis forces launched a series of limited counter-offensives designed to disrupt the Allied build-up.

US and Free French forces had breached the natural defence line of the Atlas Mountains at Faïd. Colonel-General Hans-Jürgen von Arnim's 5th *Panzer* Army was to retake it.

On 30 January the defenders were forced back, then the US 1st Armoured Division counter-attacked. The German *Panzers* seemed to withdraw, and the Americans rushed forwards, not realising it was an old trick and that a screen of 88mm guns was waiting. It became a turkey shoot, as tank after tank was knocked out. The American infantry were in slit-trenches not foxholes, so as the *Panzers* advanced a half turn was sufficient to collapse the defences and kill those inside. Faïd was retaken, and the Axis now held all the passes east out of the Atlas.

### The Battle of Kasserine

A further attack at the beginning of February forced another Allied withdrawal, to the strategically important Kasserine and Sbiba Passes, which were now prepared for defence. At the latter, US, British, and Free French forces rebuffed the attack, but at Kasserine a calamity occurred: untried US troops were overrun by experienced German and Italian forces, and they broke and ran. Rommel particularly praised Centauro's 7th *Bersaglieri* Regiment (no small matter given his usual disdain for the Italians).

The Axis advance was stopped by reinforcements rushed eastwards, by the concentration of Allied artillery, and because Axis supply-lines were overstretched. The battles, moreover, left Rommel with contempt for the Americans' fighting ability – a serious misjudgement in the longer term.

On the Allied side, Kasserine highlighted severe problems: the armour was too dispersed, air-to-ground co-ordination was poor, and US commanders were indecisive and quarrelsome. These problems had to be addressed urgently. New US commanders like Omar Bradley and George Patton took charge, and began forging an effective attacking force.

### Allied airpower

For the Allies, the Tunisia campaign was the first joint operation of the war. It would shape the future conduct of the war, because it was in North Africa that US and British commanders learnt how to conduct joint and combined operations, resolving problems of commands, tactics, logistics, and the use of airpower.

One major issue was the stress that both nations' air-forces placed on the bombing offensive against enemy cities and factories. Both resisted being used to support ground operations.

The Allies had control of the skies at Alamein and in the subsequent advance into Libya because the RAF and the Royal Navy had effectively blockaded Rommel's supply-lines. But at the start of the Tunisian campaign, this was no longer the case. The aim had been to destroy the Axis air-forces on the ground and in the air at the outset. That did not happen.

Allied airpower was not sufficient, and the Allies lacked all-weather airfields for

**Left** The Yanks are coming. Only they were not ready. The raw GIs landed in North Africa in November 1942 soon found themselves up against veteran soldiers of the finest army in the world. Greatly superior Allied numbers and firepower did not prevent the Tunisian campaign being a hard-fought, attritional struggle.

| | |
|---|---|
| **30 March** | Axis counter-offensive in the Western Desert – German armour and Italian infantry advance |
| **3 April** | British evacuate Benghazi |
| **12-13 April** | Rommel encircles Tobruk – siege begins |
| **18 November** | British Operation Crusader offensive in Libya – siege of Tobruk ended |
| **24 December** | British retake Benghazi |

## 1942

| | |
|---|---|
| **21 January** | Rommel commences second offensive |
| **29 January** | Rommel's forces retake Benghazi |
| **27 May** | Rommel launches new offensive in Libya |
| **21 June** | Rommel captures Tobruk |
| **30 June** | Rommel reaches Alamein near Alexandria in Egypt |
| **1 July** | First Battle of Alamein – Rommel's offensive held |
| **7 August** | General Bernard Montgomery takes command of 8th Army in North Africa |
| **2 September** | Rommel driven back by Montgomery at Battle of Alam Halfa |
| **23 October** | Operation Lightfoot begins – Second Battle of Alamein |
| **4 November** | Axis lines at Alamein broken |
| **8 November** | Operation Torch begins – US and British forces land in French Morocco and Algeria under Lieutenant-General Dwight D Eisenhower |
| **11 November** | Axis forces driven out of Egypt |
| **13 November** | Tobruk falls to 8th Army |
| **20 November** | Benghazi recaptured by British forces |
| **13 December** | Rommel withdraws from El Agheila |

## 1943

| | |
|---|---|
| **23 January** | 8th Army takes Tripoli |
| **29 January** | 8th Army reaches Tunisia |
| **9 March** | Rommel leaves North Africa and returns to Germany on sick leave |
| **7 May** | Allies take Tunis |
| **13 May** | German and Italian troops surrender in North Africa |

**The Allies lacked all-weather airfields – on one November night, 285 aircraft were stuck in mud.**

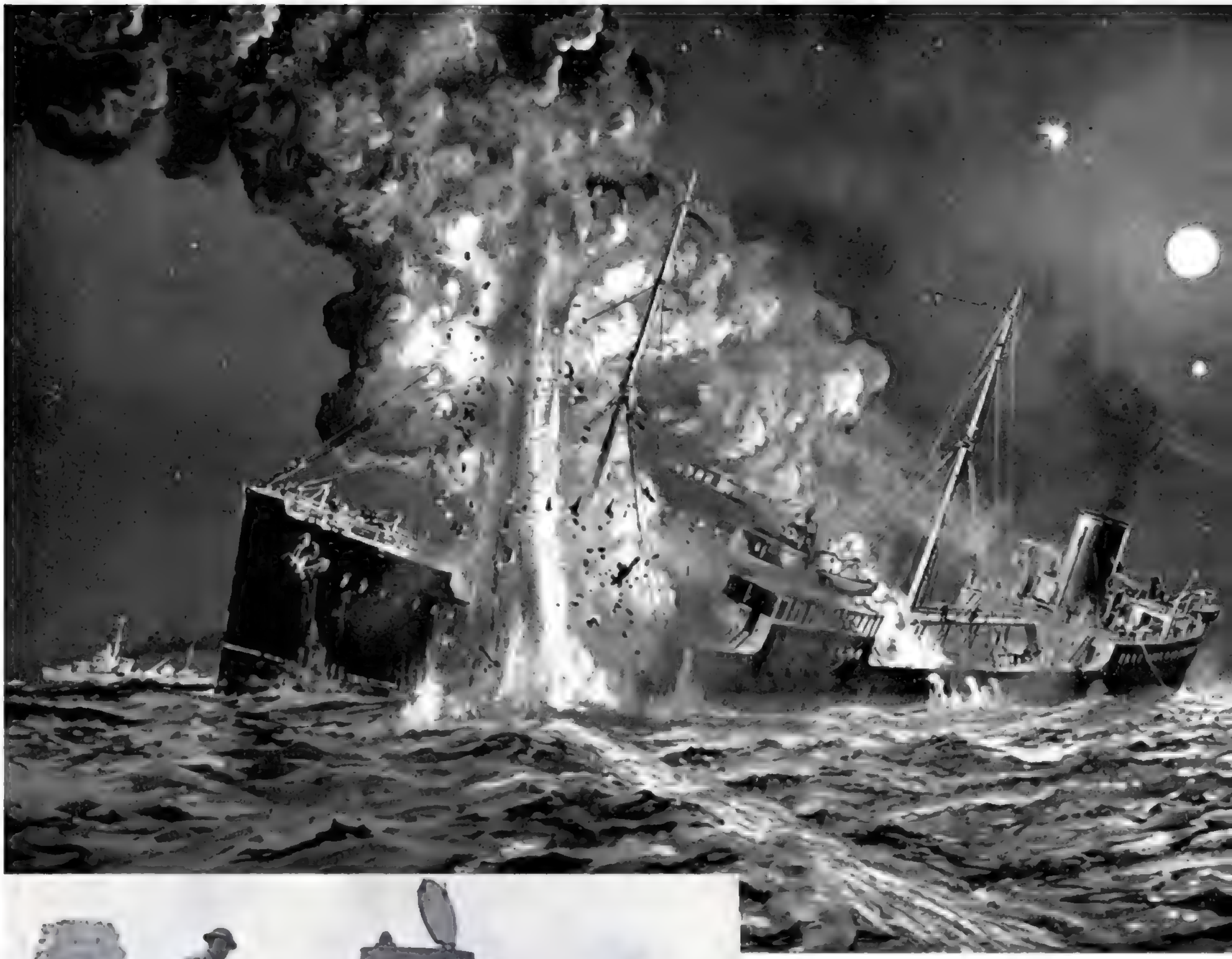
a winter campaign in the mountains of western Tunisia. It does rain in Tunisia: on one wet November night, 285 aircraft were stuck in mud at Tafaraoi airfield.

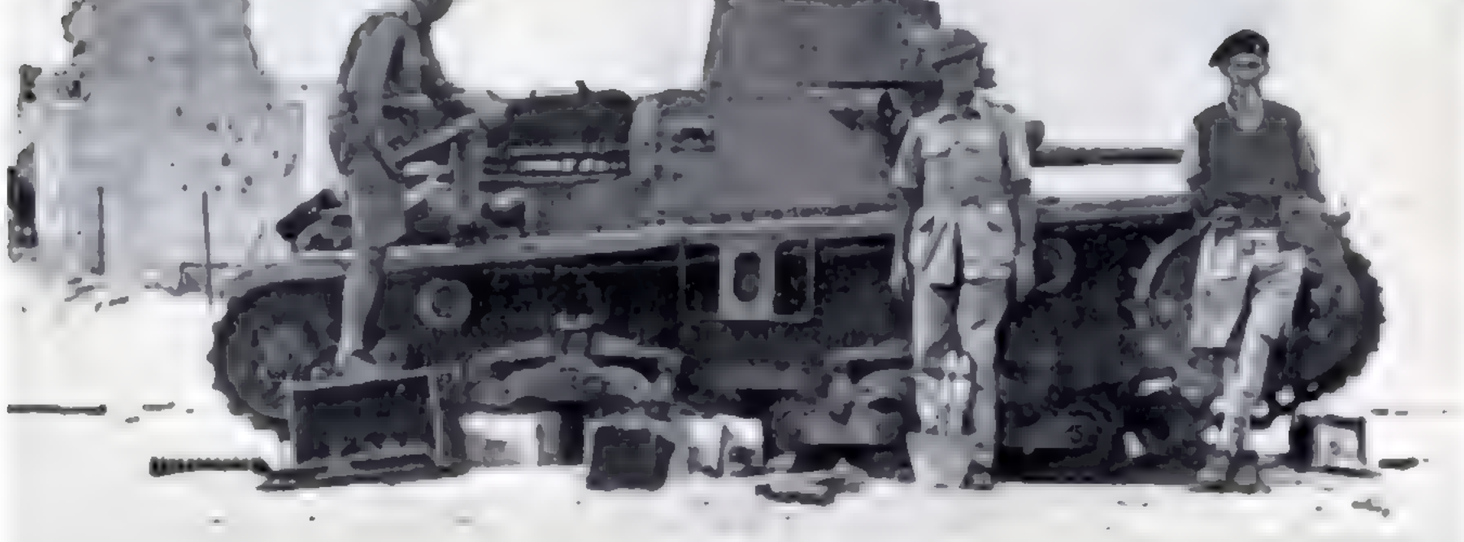
There were shortages of aircraft, trained aircrew, fuel, spare parts, and munitions. Co-ordination of bombing, ground support, and air defence was poor. Above all, there was no agreed doctrine concerning the use of airpower in support of ground forces. Neither air force had experience of this. The RAF units had largely been deployed direct from Britain, and there had been little time to learn from the experience of their comrades in the Western Desert.

The Axis, on the other hand, had all-weather airfields and air defences on the coastal plain. From Sardinia and Italy, aircraft attacked the main Allied supply port, Algiers, while units from Tunisia concentrated on ground attacks on advancing Allied forces – to great effect.

At the onset of battle, Rommel could also rely on the short supply-line from Sicily. It took time for the Allies to realise that victory depended on choking off that route and for them to move their air units eastwards from western Algeria and Morocco so they were within range to achieve that.

It took until February for the British Air Chief-Marshal Tedder to take overall charge of air operations in the Mediterranean theatre, with the US Airforce Lieutenant-General Carl Spaatz commander of the crucial North-West African Air Force, where he worked in ▷





## 'STEEL COFFIN': THE ITALIAN M13 MEDIUM TANK

The M13/1940 medium tank was the only Italian tank to see major action in the war. It fought in relatively large numbers in the Tunisian campaign.

Built by FIAT and the Ansaldo steel-makers, its armour consisted of riveted plates which shattered like glass when hit by anti-tank shells; the other combatants used welding to secure the armoured plating. The M13 had half the weight, and a fraction of the firepower and off-road speed of the Grant and Sherman tanks being used by the Allied forces in increasing numbers.

The Ariete armoured division attempted to make up for its faults by rushing at the enemy at maximum speed, just 13 kilometres an hour, to get within 400 metres of the enemy, hoping not too many M13s would be knocked out on the way. Getting in close also allowed them to use their limited supplies of shells to greater effect.

The M13's 47mm gun could pierce the armour of the lighter Allied tanks but not the heavier ones. Few of this model had radios.

Given the severe limitations of the M13, it is hard to understand why Mussolini did not accept a German offer that Italian factories might manufacture German *Panzers*, or why the Italians did not simply copy a Russian T-34 tank they captured early in 1941. The answer, presumably, has something to do with the irrational nationalism and bombastic, strutting leadership of Italian Fascism.

close co-operation with Eisenhower, the overall Allied commander, and his field commanders.

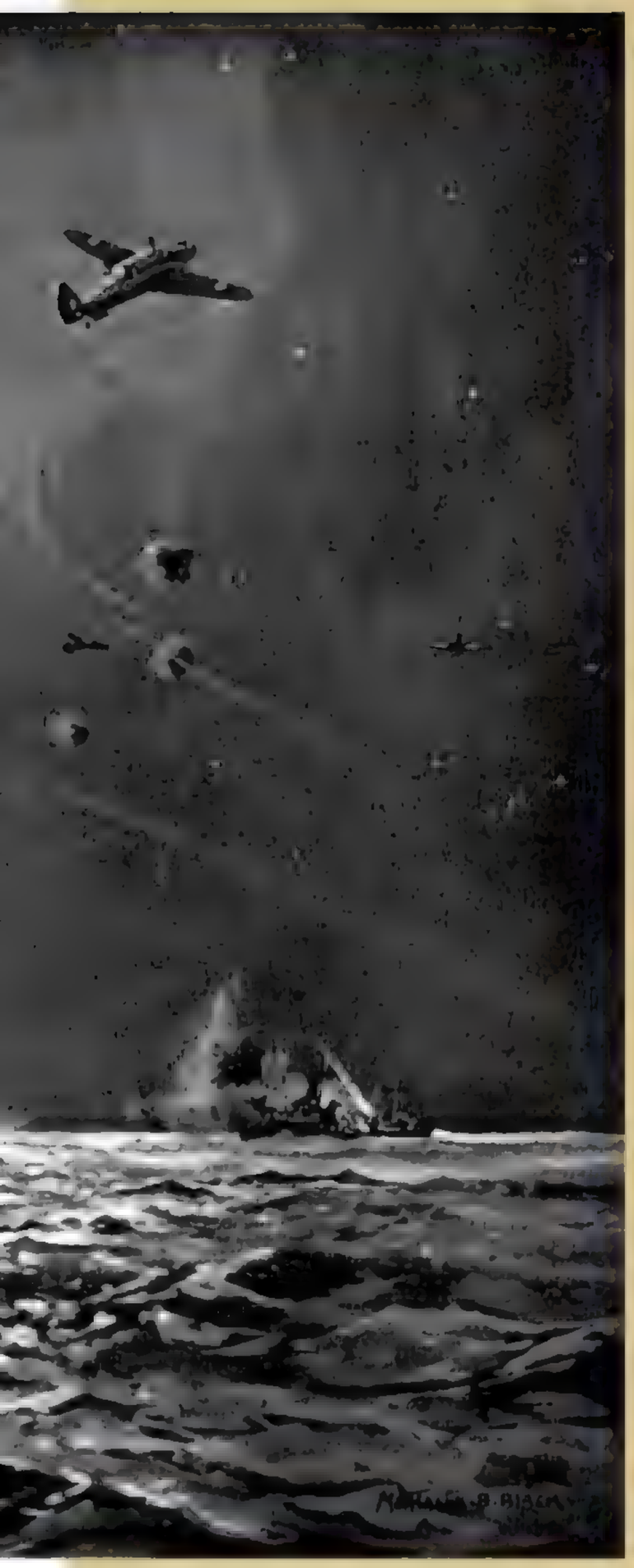
### The March offensive

By March, the Allies were ready to launch their offensive on Tunisia. Phase A was for the US 2nd Corps to take Gafsa and cut off Axis forces facing the British 8th Army. Phase B was for both Allied forces to capture all of Tunisia south of Gabes. Phase C was the conquest of the remaining northern area.

The introduction of radar, fighter control systems, and all-weather runways allowed the Allies to go onto the offensive against their opponents, destroying them in the air and on the ground, and thus gaining vital air superiority.

By now Rommel had returned to Germany because of illness. He was replaced by von Arnim.

In Phase A, Patton took Gafsa and came to within just 50 miles of the coast. The 8th Army now had to attack the Mareth Line (originally built by the French to fend off an Italian attack). The initial attack was held and



**Above** Allied air superiority was a decisive advantage in the Tunisian campaign, both in support of ground operations and in severing the Axis maritime supply-line. This wartime artist's reconstruction shows an Axis merchant tanker being sunk by Allied torpedo-bombers.

**Top right** RAF Bostons fly over the Tunisian mountains.

**Right** Map of the Tunisian campaign showing the frontlines in April 1943.

Montgomery now called on airpower to blast a way through to Gabes. Satisfied with the results, on 26 March the 8th Army attacked with the sun at its back, hindering the Axis defenders, and with a creeping barrage clearing the way in front. British armour and New Zealand infantry broke through, taking Gabes before stopping.

US airforce Major-General Jimmy Doolittle, famous for his raid on Tokyo in January 1942, devised Operation Flax, the destruction of all Axis supply vessels and planes, forcing their airforce into battle to defend the supply-lines. By April, the air battle had been won and the Allies controlled the skies. Axis forces were effectively cut off. ▷

A quarter of a million Axis soldiers were captured, equivalent to the loss at Stalingrad earlier in the year.

**Above** Spoils of war: British soldiers take a ride in a captured German half-track.

**Below** A new monster of the battlefield – one of the small number of Tiger tanks that participated in the Tunisian campaign.

## The assault on Tunis

The final assault on Tunis, Operation Vulcan, envisaged the British 1st Army taking Tunis, the US 2nd Corps taking Bizerta, and the British 8th Army holding down Axis forces on the east flank. Five German and nine Italian divisions had been ordered to fight to the last. The Allies deployed 20 divisions. The advances on Tunis and Bizerta were slow and costly, with Axis forces defending each ridge and hill.

On 7 May, the defences of both cities were finally cracked. Units of the British 1st Army entered the capital that afternoon, and the US 9th Division seized Bizerta. Allied naval vessels rushed into the straits between Cap Bon and Sicily to prevent any evacuation. Fighting continued in Cap Bon until 13 May, when the last pocket of Italian resistance ended.

A quarter of a million Axis soldiers were captured, equivalent to the loss at Stalingrad earlier in the year. 'Tunisgrad' meant the loss of most of Italy's battle-hardened units, and much of its modern equipment, already in short supply. Along with the mass strike against the war in northern Italy two months earlier, this defeat was decisive in ending the dictatorship of Benito Mussolini. Victory in Tunisia meant the invasion of Italy was clearly next on the Allied agenda.

The war in North Africa was over. What did the Allied victory achieve? Three Axis armies totalling 620,000 men had been destroyed – the Italian army that had originally invaded Egypt, the Italo-German army sent to recoup the situation after its destruction, and the Axis army sent to hold Tunisia. The vital Suez Canal was secure, and the Mediterranean was effectively under Allied control.

Yet one million Allied troops were in North Africa, far from any direct approach on Germany – and an invasion of Western Europe was the US priority. Washington would, in the event, agree to a landing in Sicily, but there was a growing determination that after the attack on Italy, the US would insist, over British objections, that there had to be an attack on occupied Europe across the English Channel.

# THE MYTH OF ITALIAN 'COWARDICE'

Heard the one about the Italian tank? Five gears: four reverse, one forward! The popular myth of Italian cowardice has held fast for over seven decades, ever since the Second World War ended. It is enshrined in *'Allo 'Allo*, with its portrayal of an Italian officer more interested in making love than war.

In examining the reality of the Italian armed forces' performance in the Second World War, it is worth examining the reality behind the façade of strength and energy projected by Mussolini's Fascist regime.

First, despite his claims to have modernised Italy, the country which finally entered the war in June 1940 was no better prepared than liberal-run Italy had been in 1915, when it had joined the Allies in the First World War. Indeed, Italy's ability to mass-produce armaments was markedly worse in the second conflict than in the first.

That is the ultimate indictment of Fascist rule – because it was Mussolini himself who presented war as the ultimate test of the regime.

## AN INCOMPETENT REGIME

Unlike Hitler, *il Duce* had left the armed forces to the existing officer corps, and did not try to develop a parallel and rival force along the lines of the SS. The Italian high command had been serious contenders for the most bone-headed during the 1915-1918 war, and little had changed since.

The army lacked modern weapons, motorised transport, and a modern doctrine of war. The air force could not compete with the RAF, and the navy, while modern, was outfought by its British counterpart.

But none of this seemed to matter, because Mussolini had not meant to fight any sort of prolonged war when he announced that Italy was joining Germany's side. In June 1940 he looked on like a scavenger as France neared defeat, and it appeared the war would be over in weeks.

Mussolini had told Hitler in September 1939 that he could not join the conflict because Italy would not be ready to fight until 1943. He told his own generals in June 1940 not to worry because Italy would not enter the war.

There was no coherent war strategy, and things went badly wrong when Italy's enemies fought back. Italy's poor resources were spread thin as Mussolini dispatched valuable forces to the Balkans and to Russia, even sending planes in 1940 to help the assault on Britain.

Mussolini should have concentrated his all on defeating the British in North Africa, the key to domination of the Mediterranean. Instead, more Italian troops would be stationed in occupied Yugoslavia and Greece than in Libya.

Most telling against the myth of Italian cowardice is the simple fact that most Italians did not want to fight in 1940 – as Mussolini's secret police accurately reported. Anti-Fascism would re-emerge as a powerful force as Italy faced defeat, with a general strike across northern Italy in March 1943 heralding the end of Mussolini's rule.

## A RAMSHACKLE ARMY

Mussolini claimed Italy would fight a parallel war with Germany. Such dreams came to an end in late 1940. *Il Duce*, keen to win territory like his ally in Berlin, launched an invasion of Greece from Italian-controlled Albania.

The roads and ports on which the Italians depended were woefully inadequate, the invaders were outnumbered by the defenders, and their commanders ordered linear attacks on fixed positions. The invasion became a rout, and the situation was only saved when Hitler invaded Yugoslavia and then, with some reluctance, agreed to move south into Greece.

The Royal Navy's Fleet Air Arm damaged three battleships in a torpedo-bomber attack on Otranto on the south-east coast, and all Italian warships were promptly moved to Naples and other ports on the west coast of the peninsula.

Finally, after much prodding from Mussolini, an Italian army of 215,000 troops crossed from the Italian colony of Libya into Egypt and then... halted! The British commander, General Archibald Wavell, was outnumbered, but his forces were mechanised, and when he went onto the offensive, the Italians – without tanks and with few trucks – fell back on foot.

Wavell sent General Richard O'Connor with his armoured force south through the desert to cut the coast road in the retreating Italian army's rear. Cut off without food or water, surrender was the only option.

The Axis recovery in North Africa was once again in large part due to the arrival of the Germans – in this case, Rommel's Afrika Korps with its *Panzers*. But there was also a revival of Italian combat performance as better-trained units arrived with new equipment, including tanks.

Italian forces recorded victories over the British. In the two battles of Alamein, the Italians fought bravely. When superior numbers and armour prevailed, many of the Italians on the southern end of the Axis line surrendered simply because they had no means of escape except on foot (they also blamed the Germans for stealing what transport and fuel they had had).

But other Italian units did make a fighting withdrawal, and in the final North African battles in Tunisia against American and British forces they fought to the bitter end in what became a mini-Stalingrad. Neither Hitler nor Mussolini would evacuate their forces, even though they were aware an invasion of Italy was imminent.

## THE PARTISANS

When Allied forces invaded Sicily in July 1943, Italian resistance collapsed because it was obvious Fascism was finished. Mussolini was dismissed by the king, jailed, and then rescued by the Germans to be installed as nominal ruler of northern and central Italy. The king bungled making peace with the Allies, and allowed the Germans to take over the bulk of the peninsula.

For the remaining months of the war, what is striking is not the cowardice of Italians, but their readiness to fight. Large numbers fought for Mussolini and the Axis, despite the certainty of defeat and the growing knowledge of the evil being inflicted by the Third Reich (Italian Fascists sent Italian Jews to the death camps), and some joined a new army being raised in the Allied zone. Meanwhile, the anti-Fascist resistance, the biggest in Western Europe, liberated Naples, Florence, Bologna, Milan, Turin, Genoa, and Venice.

There was no shortage of courage in war in the Italy of 1943, 1944, and 1945.

**Below** Benito Mussolini in Rome in 1922. The contradiction between the weakness of the Italian economy and the imperial ambition of Italy's leaders was unbridgeable. The armed forces were hopelessly ill-equipped to fight a modern war, and most Italians had no enthusiasm for one. Italian soldiers were not cowardly; they had simply grown to hate their bombastic Fascist leaders.

**Right** Italian soldiers surrender to the 8th Army during the Tunisian campaign. Military failure and mass surrenders created a British wartime myth of Italian cowardice. But there was nothing cowardly about the anti-Fascist partisans.

FRONTLINE

# AIRSHIP against AA guns

*Combat is the exception not the rule in war. Most wartime experience is a matter of routine, hard work, discomfort, and boredom. But the humdrum is punctuated by occasional outbursts of terrifying violence. And this, explains Clausewitz, the great philosopher of war, is the point of it all: war turns on battle, and war's outcomes therefore depend on what thousands of men do in this most extreme of human experiences.*

This was John Keegan's inspiration when, in *The Face of Battle*, a seminal study published in 1976, he rewrote the history of three great battles – Agincourt, Waterloo, and the Somme – from the perspective of those 'at the point of maximum danger'. What was it like, he asked, to be a French knight facing the arrow-storm in 1415, a British redcoat defending a square in 1815, a German conscript entombed in a dugout under artillery fire in 1916? For the battles on which war turns, he argued, hinge as much on the reactions of the rank and file 'at the sharp end' as they do on the plans of generals.

So we are launching a new occasional series where we stare into 'the face of battle'. Using first-hand accounts of actual combat, we aim to explore the diversity of human experience and reaction across the history of war. As well as our testimony, we include special box features dealing with weapons, tactics, and the men themselves.

We begin on the night of 13/14 October 1915 with a cruise over London at about 10,000 feet, moving across the sky in a glare of arcing searchlights and amid flashes of bursting shrapnel. The narrator is Kapitänleutenant Joachim Breithaupt, the young naval officer who commands Zeppelin L15.

One of five Zeppelins deployed against the British capital that night, L15's bombing run was by far the most effective, leaving 47 killed, 102 injured, and £80,020 worth of damage following a succession of blasts that extended from the Strand in the west to Cable Street in the east.

What was it like for the 16 men aboard L15, pioneers of war in a new dimension and protagonists of history's first strategic bombing campaign?

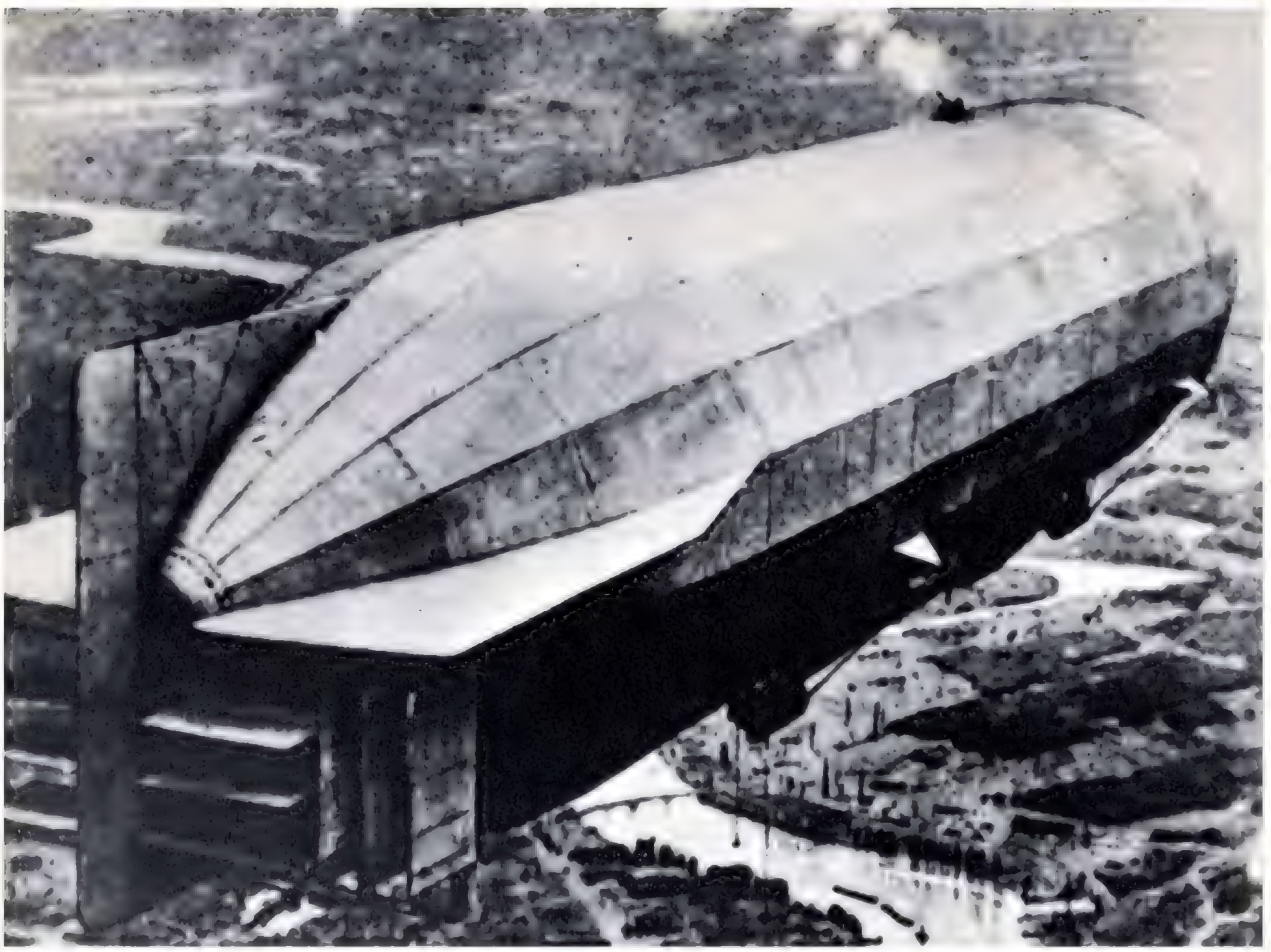
**EVENT:** Zeppelin Raid
**DATE:** 13/14 October 1915
**TESTIMONY:** Joachim Breithaupt

London had always appeared to me the most rewarding target for an air attack, and I had accordingly planned the course for such a flight. In the early morning of 13 October 1915, orders for an attack by all available airships arrived by telephone. Preparations were immediately begun. The crews, pleased with their first opportunity to take part in a raid, carried the munitions and bombs on board, and the petrol tanks and gas bags were filled.

At 1300 hours, Central European time, the L15 was in the air. On board were two officers, two warrant officers, and 12 ratings. The total weight-carrying capacity of the ship, including barometers, temperature- and humidity-measuring appliances, and also the specific weight of the gas was about 30,800lbs. At this weight, the petrol comprised about 11,000lbs, and bombs 3,410lbs (28 explosive bombs of 110lbs each, and 15 incendiary bombs of 22lbs each).

We steered over the Frisian Islands outside the three-mile limit in order to avoid infringing Dutch neutrality. Thick fog lay over the sea. We rose, therefore, in order to avoid the so-called 'washhouse' and surmount the clouds. In bright sunshine the airships steered between the cloud masses at various altitudes. We closed with the other two airships on the same mission as ourselves. ▷

**Right** Kapitänleutenant Joachim Breithaupt, German Naval Airship Division, commander of Zeppelin L15 on 13/14 October 1915.



## APPROACH TO LONDON

The English opinion that the airships manoeuvred in formations under the leadership of a commander-in-chief or senior officer is not correct. The order of the day was as follows: 'Attack military and economic objectives of importance in South England.' Each commander acted within the limits of this general order as an independent unit; the choice of objectives was always left to the pilot.

Korvettenkapitän Strasser avoided giving more than general directions. He knew, as an experienced pilot, how much the decision of the commander must be influenced by weather and local conditions. For this reason, the ships did not fly in close formation.

At 1930 hours we were between Cromer and Great Yarmouth at a height of 6,500 feet, a few miles off the coast. The visibility was good under a starlit sky. In the distance gleamed the white breakers, and beyond them the outline of the cliffs was clearly cut against the sky.

We took our bearings precisely, waited for full darkness, and then steered a direct course for our objective – London. As we crossed over the coast we came under sharp fire from the batteries, and the ships were lit up by the searchlights of the coastguard and shore batteries.

As we flew over the land we checked our position from time to time by dropping light bombs. At about 2130 hours the Thames, with its characteristic windings, was clearly distinguishable below us. All water ballast was now thrown out so that we might attain the greatest possible height, and all hands manned action stations. London lay darkly under us, only a few lights showing.

## SEARCHLIGHTS AND SHRAPNEL

Suddenly, from all sides, searchlights leaped out towards us, and as we flew over Tottenham a wild barrage from the anti-aircraft positions began. The shells burst at a good height right on our course. I therefore rose, after dropping three explosive bombs, and endeavoured to make an attack from another quarter. We circled round London by north and north-west.

At about 2200 hours we were well west of the sea of houses, which could now, on account of the many searchlights, be clearly seen. We then steered over Hyde Park, in the direction of the City. The picture we saw was indescribably beautiful – shrapnel bursting all around (though rather uncomfortably near us), our own bombs bursting, and the flashes from the anti-aircraft batteries below. On either hand, the other airships, which, like us, were caught in the rays of the searchlights, were visible.

And over us the starlit sky! Still, at such a moment one is inclined to be a little insensitive to the beauties of nature –

and to the feelings of the people below. It is only afterwards that all this comes to one's consciousness. At that moment we needed our wits about us. We flew over the City at between 9,000 and 9,800 feet, and dropped 20 110lb bombs and all the incendiary bombs. We could see large explosions between Charing Cross Station and the Bank of England.

From what I could make out, the anti-aircraft shells exploded for the most part too high. From all sides blazed the flashes of the guns. There was only one thing to do – carry on and trust in our star. What effect the bombs had at the places where the flames were observed I cannot say, but I believe it was pretty warm in the City. I have learned from English eye-witnesses that the attack of our airships made no small impression on the people.

## THE OTHER SIDE OF THE HILL

Captain Joseph Morris writes of this attack in his interesting book *The German Air Raids on Great Britain* as follows: 'The casualties caused, if considered from the point of view of the total number of ships employed and bombs expended, were more severe than in any other airship raid before or after. Breithaupt reserved most of his bombs until well over the centre of the City and dropped them on Exeter Street, Wellington Street (between the Lyceum Theatre and the offices of *The Morning Post*), on Catherine Street, Aldwych, the Royal Courts of Justice, Carey Street, Lincoln's Inn, Hatton Garden, and Farringdon Road. In all, 19 high-explosive and 11 incendiary bombs fell from his ship on London.' This statement corresponds with my own observations.

Sixty minutes had simply flown by since we dropped the first bombs. We breathed more freely as at about 2245 hours we left the City behind us. Then, suddenly, as we were about over Leyton, a new and murderous fire began from a direction in which we had not expected it. At the same time, through the rays of the searchlights, a number of British aircraft appeared on both sides, and were simultaneously reported to be overhead by the lookout man on top of the ship.

Morris disputes the presence of aircraft in the air on this occasion, but I believe he is wrong. Star shells whizzed through the air, describing glowing white parabolas as perfect as any drawn on paper.

Over the coast, in the neighbourhood of Ipswich, we again suddenly came under fire, at about 0030 hours. Searchlights played around us, but the last shell shot far away below us as a parting salutation, and we found ourselves over the sea at 12,500 feet.

We announced the result of the attack by wireless telegraph to our chief, and steered for the Dutch coast. Fog again lay thick over the North Sea, and it was difficult to keep our course, even with wireless directions. Time pressed, since we had only enough petrol for a few hours more.

At last, at 1300 hours in the afternoon of the following day, we made out the captive balloon which was flying over the fog above our landing-place as a guide for us. We came down, through a sheet of cloud 1,000 feet thick, and landed safely, being warmly greeted by our commander and other comrades, who had landed earlier. ▷

## TECHNIQUES AND TACTICS

Zeppelins were essentially stealth-bombers that relied on the darkness of long moonless nights for safety, often launching their bombing runs with engines shut down, drifting silently with the wind. They were greatly handicapped by their sensitivity to adverse weather, inclination to technical breakdown, limited payloads, and lack of any effective bomb-aiming devices.

Nonetheless, despite the apparent vulnerability of giant, slow-moving machines filled with inflammable gas, the British struggled to develop an effective air-defence system.

Intercepted wireless communications were passed from specialised listening-stations on the coast to a decoding centre (Room 40) at the Admiralty, and then telephone messages giving early warning of enemy air-raids were passed to regional command-and-control centres. That for London's West Sub-Command, for example, was at Putney. These centres were linked by telephone to a network of observation posts, searchlights, and AA guns; typically there were two searchlights to every gun.

Direct hits were few, kills very rare. During the entire war, Britain's home defences shot down only nine airships, of which seven fell to fighters, only two to AA fire. The main effect of the guns was to drive the Zeppelins away from their preferred targets, and to force them too high for accurate bombing.

## FRONTLINE FIGHTER

Zeppelin crew were a military élite. All had to be highly skilled, exceptionally fit and resilient, and possessed of great courage and steady nerves.

Half were machinists, who worked and maintained the engines. They would be on duty for up to 24 hours in a confined space filled with ear-splitting noise and noxious fumes. Many routinely developed splitting headaches.

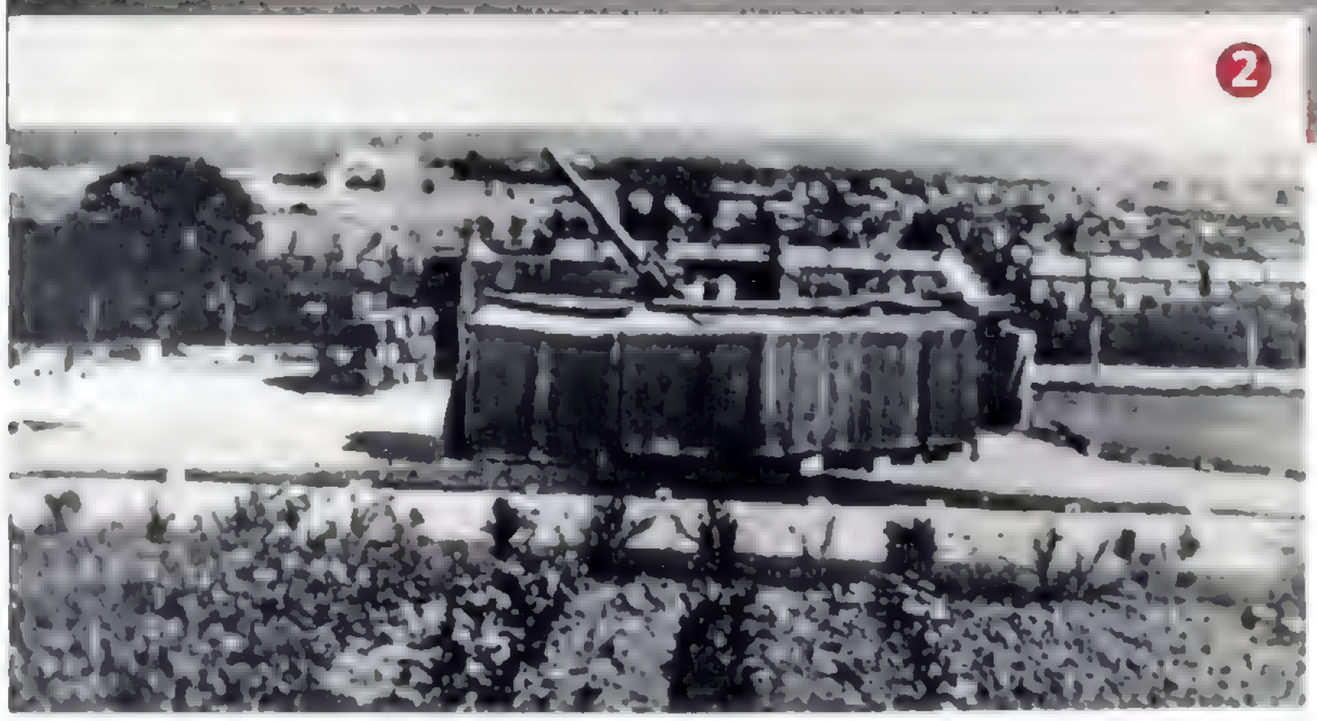
The commander, the navigator, and the operators of rudders, elevators, and wireless were stationed in the forward control gondola. Here, as well as noise, there was bitter cold, with temperatures sometimes sinking as low as –25º. Clothing included woollen underwear, naval uniform, leather overalls, fur overcoats, leather helmets, gloves of leather and wool, boots covered by large felt overshoes, and scarves and goggles. Bread, sausage, stew, chocolate, and strong coffee provided sustenance.

One or two men would also be stationed on top of the airship, occupying a combined observation and machine-gun post, standing fully exposed to the bitter draft as their vessel cruised the upper skies.

Two years later, when a new generation of 'height-climber' Zeppelins were introduced – airships designed to operate at 20,000 feet or more, above both the maximum range of AA guns and the ceiling of home-defence fighters – the physical demands on crew became almost unbearable. As machines were buffeted by gales unknown to weather stations on the ground, as engines seized up, metalwork shattered, and instruments failed in the bitter cold, aircrew were afflicted by pounding headaches, nausea, exhaustion, and frostbite. Thus did men enter the eerie new combat zone of the sub-stratosphere.

Aircrew in the forward control gondola of a Zeppelin.

Crew pose at an airship's upper observation and machine-gun post.



## WEAPON SYSTEMS

### ZEPPELIN L15

L15 was a P-class Zeppelin of the German Naval Airship Division. A huge, lightweight framework of duralumin girders and steel wires supported a row of gas bags made of animal membrane, cotton fabric, and glue. These, when inflated, contained more than a million cubic feet of hydrogen gas, and filled most of the interior space.

Stretched over the exterior of the framework was an envelope of light cotton fabric, coated in dope, laced together, and pulled taut. The keel of the duralumin framework formed a gangway running the length of the ship, and here were stowed water-ballast sacks, petrol tanks, and bomb racks. Sufficient fuel could be carried to allow cruises of up to 2,700 miles.

Slung beneath the keel were the forward control gondola and the rearward engine gondola. The ship's four Maybach 240hp engines allowed the machine, 164m long by 19m wide, to ascend to heights of up to 12,000 feet and to cruise at speeds of up to 60mph. Direction was controlled by cables which ran from the forward control gondola to movable rudders and elevators attached to the ends of the tail-fins.

### 3-INCH QF ANTI-AIRCRAFT GUN

In mid 1915, at a relatively early stage in the development of their air defences, the British relied more on guns than fighters. The mainstay of the defence was the 3-inch Quick Firing AA gun. Some were mounted in fixed positions, others were transported on the backs of lorries. They had a 360° traverse, a 90° elevation, a rate of fire of around 15 shells a minute, and a vertical range of approximately 16,000 feet.

**1.** A Royal Navy mobile air-defence brigade at Kenwood House, Hampstead, in December 1915. Notice both AA guns and searchlights.

**2.** A fixed-position 3-inch QF anti-aircraft gun at Pole Hill, Essex, covering the north-eastern approaches to London.

**3.** A lorry-mounted 3-inch QF anti-aircraft gun.

# SUBSCRIBE TO *MILITARY HISTORY MONTHLY* MAGAZINE TODAY AND SAVE OVER £10*

**1 YEAR SUBSCRIPTION**
(12 issues)

UK DIRECT DEBIT ONLY
**£34.95** ~~£47.40~~
**SAVE OVER 25%**

UK CHEQUE/CARD PAYMENT
**£36.95** ~~£47.40~~
**SAVE OVER 20%**

Overseas CHEQUE/CARD PAYMENT
**£46.95** ~~£60.00~~
**SAVE OVER 20%**

**SAVE OVER 25%**
DIRECT DEBIT ORDERS ONLY

# SAVE OVER 25%

- ★ **Save over £10**
- ★ **Never miss an issue**
- ★ **Every issue delivered free to your door**

## *MILITARY HISTORY MONTHLY* BINDERS AND SLIP CASES NOW AVAILABLE

We are now able to supply both binders and slip cases to house your magazines. They each hold up to 12 issues in a smart black case, and both are available for £15 (including UK postage and packing and VAT), or £20 for our overseas readers.

Order by phone on +44 (0)20 8819 5580,
or at our address: Current Publishing, Lamb House,
Church Street, London W4 2PD

## SUBSCRIBE FOR ONE YEAR (12 ISSUES)

**BY POST** *Military History Monthly*, Lamb House, Church St, London W4 2PD

**YOUR DETAILS**

Your Name

Your Address

Postcode

Email

Tel. no.

## SAVE OVER 25% RRP ~~£47.40~~

*Special **Direct Debit** rate, **ONLY £34.95**

☐ **Direct Debit** Please complete the form

Please fill in the whole form using a ballpoint pen and send it to:
*Military History Monthly*, Lamb House, Church Street, London W4 2PD
Name and full postal address of your Bank or Building Society

To the Manager — Bank/Building Society

Address

Postcode

Name(s) of Account Holder(s)

Bank/Building Society account number

Bank sort code

Reference (for office use only)

Signature

Date

DIRECT Debit

Originator's Identification Number
9 7 1 7 4 3

Instruction to your Bank or Building Society
Please pay Current Publishing Ltd Direct Debits from the account detailed in this instruction subject to the safeguards assured by the Direct Debit Guarantee. I understand that this instruction may remain with Current Publishing Ltd and, if so, details may be passed electronically to my Bank/Building Society.

You may cancel your subscription at any time. Unless you cancel, your subscription will continue automatically at the special rate of just £42 per year – saving over £5 off the full rate.

## SAVE OVER 20% RRP ~~£47.40~~

**Cheque/Credit Card** rate **ONLY £36.95**

**Overseas rate £46.95**

☐ **£36.95** (UK) ☐ **£46.95** (Overseas)

☐ **Cheque** I enclose a cheque for _____ payable to *Military History Monthly*

☐ **Credit Card** Please debit my Mastercard/Visa/Maestro/Delta the sum of _____

Card No. Issue No. (Maestro only)

Expiry Date Start Date

Signature Date

**Privacy Policy:** *Military History Monthly* may send you details of our products and services that we think would be of interest to you. Please tick if you do not wish to receive such offers ☐. Occasionally we may pass your details to selected companies. If you do not wish to receive their products or offers, please tick this box ☐. REF: MHM32

## SUBSCRIBE ONLINE
**www.military-history.org/subscribe**

## SUBSCRIBE BY PHONE
**020 8819 5580**
Please quote MHM32

# African Battlefields

"African Battlefields" is a registered South African tour operator based in Pretoria, specializing in the Anglo Zulu war of 1879 and Anglo Boer Battlefields of 1899 to 1902 during the British colonial era of 19th century Africa.

- All year round escorted tours. Groups of two to twenty.
- Anglo Zulu sites of Isandhlwana, Rorkes Drift, Fugitives Drift, Fort Eshowe and Ulundi.
- Anglo Boer siege towns (Ladysmith, Kimberley and Mafekeng), Winston Churchill's train ambush and his prison, the killing field of Spionkop and much more.
- Once you arrive we take care of all your travel arrangements.

For more information please contact:

**Bob Wood**
Owner and registered Battlefields Tour Guide

info@africatravelservices.co.za
*www.africatravelservices.co.za*
++27 83 448 6898

HOLTS TOURS

# Battlefields & History

Our 2013 programme of Ancient, Medieval, Napoleonic and 20th Century tours include the anniversary tours of Gettysburg 1863, Kursk 1943, Leipzig 1813 and the Dambusters 1943. We will also be looking at Budapest in WW2 and after, Alfred the Great, Scapa Flow, Berlin 1945 , the Civil Service Rifles in WW1, Sicily 1943 and many more.

We have selected a team of guides whose knowledge and experience, clear explanations and orientation bring history to life.

*Ask our friendly staff for our 2013 Brochure or visit our website*

Holts are pleased to support Military History Monthly

**Holts Tours - The original and still the best.**

**www.holts.co.uk**

**01293 865000**

ABTA No. Y1538

*All our tours are 100% financially protected*

# Guided Battlefield Tours

We are an established company and specialise in tours to World War 1 and World War 2 sites. We know that every tour member has a personal reason to travel with us. We limit the numbers on each tour; this allows you to travel in comfort and allows us to ensure that your reasons for travelling with us are met.

**www.guidedbattlefieldtours.co.uk**

**Telephone:** 01633 258207 **email:** info@guidedbattlefieldtours.co.uk

**Left** Guy Penrose Gibson (second from left) and other members of RAF 617 Squadron shortly after the Dam Busters Raid on 16 May 1943.

# THE DAM BUSTERS

Marking the 70-year anniversary of the actual raid, **Taylor Downing** reviews classic war-movie *The Dam Busters*.

At 7.30am on 17 May 1943, Flying Officer Jerry Fray took off in his photo-reconnaissance Spitfire for a damage-assessment sortie over Germany. At 30,000 feet and about 100 miles from the Ruhr, he could see what looked like a bank of cloud to his east, but as he flew closer he realised it was the sun glinting on the mass of water that filled the valley below the Möhne Dam.

He was stunned by the fact that the floodwater was about a mile wide in the valley, and was still gushing through a massive breach in the dam wall. He was overcome by the immensity of the destruction below him, and wondered 'if the powers that be realised just how much damage had been done'.

He took a series of photos, then went on to the Eder valley, where the damage and flooding looked even more extensive. He took more photos, and then spotted two enemy aircraft approaching. So he turned, and in his unarmed photo-recon Spitfire headed for home at full speed.

## Front-page news

The pin-sharp aerial photos Fray took were on the front page of every British newspaper the following morning. A short communiqué issued by the Air Ministry outlined the targets as three Ruhr dams and added, 'The attacks were pressed home from a very low level with great determination and coolness in the face of fierce resistance.'

Realising how important the dams were to the supply of water and hydro-electric power for the coke ovens and steel mills at the heart of the German war economy, the press went into overdrive. The *Daily Telegraph* proclaimed on its front page, 'With one single blow the RAF has precipitated what may prove to be the greatest industrial disaster yet inflicted on Germany in this war.' The legend of the Dam Busters was born.

The story of how a brilliant but whacky inventor, Barnes Wallis, comes up with the idea of a bouncing bomb, and of how a new squadron of some of the best fliers in the RAF, 617 Squadron, is put together under Wing Commander Guy Gibson to carry out the daring, high-risk mission to bomb the dams, is well known. The raid has probably become the most-famous RAF bombing mission of the war. That is partly down to the success of one of the best British war films ever produced. *The Dam Busters* was premièred on the 12th anniversary of the raid in May 1955. It still feels real, and is compelling viewing nearly 60 years later.

### THE BOMBING OFFENSIVE

RAF Bomber Command entered the Second World War with the wrong aircraft, inadequate bombs, and tactics that did not work: daylight bombing was soon abandoned after heavy casualties. But the crews had not been trained for night flying, and did not have the navigational aids to cross hundreds of miles of blacked-out enemy territory in the dark. As a consequence, bombs were dropped all over Germany but rarely on the target. Sometimes, after a raid, German intelligence could not even work out which city the RAF had been targeting.

The Butt Report carried out for Churchill in August 1941 analysed 600 aerial photos, and concluded that on an average night only one aircraft in 15 managed to get their bombs within five miles of the target. In November of that year, Churchill suspended the bombing offensive fearing that too little was being achieved for too much jeopardy.

When the bombing offensive began again in spring 1942, Bomber Command had a new generation of aircraft to draw on: the four-engine 'heavies', the Stirling, Halifax, and Lancaster. They also had the first radio-guided navigational aids, Gee and later Oboe, and by 1943 they had an airborne ground-radar mapping system known as H2S. They also had a new commander, Air Chief-Marshal Arthur 'Bomber' Harris, who brought an aggressive new determination to the bombing campaign.

Harris believed in the concept of 'area bombing' (colloquially known as 'carpet bombing'), the tactic of bombing a wide area including the homes of workers and the cities themselves, as well as factories, airfields, and shipyards. This was within the capacity of his bombers.

What marks out the Dam Busters Raid is that it was the first time Lancaster bombers were used for a precision raid of this sort. It became the most famous RAF bombing raid of the war, but in many ways it was highly unusual.

The producers of the Associated British Picture Corporation wanted to make their film as realistic as possible. It was shot in black and white deliberately to give it a grainy, authentic 1940s feel. The script was written by the celebrated playwright R C Sherriff (best known for

**Left** Air Chief-Marshal Sir Arthur 'Bomber' Harris, commander-in-chief of Bomber Command, chatting with RAF pilots, May 1940.

*Journey's End* in 1929, the drama set in a World War I dugout). But it was based on Paul Brickhill's book *The Dam Busters*, published in 1951, and much of the dialogue is taken from the book. This in itself derived much of its flying details from Guy Gibson's own book, *Enemy Coast Ahead*, written in 1944 but published posthumously in 1946.

## Attention to detail

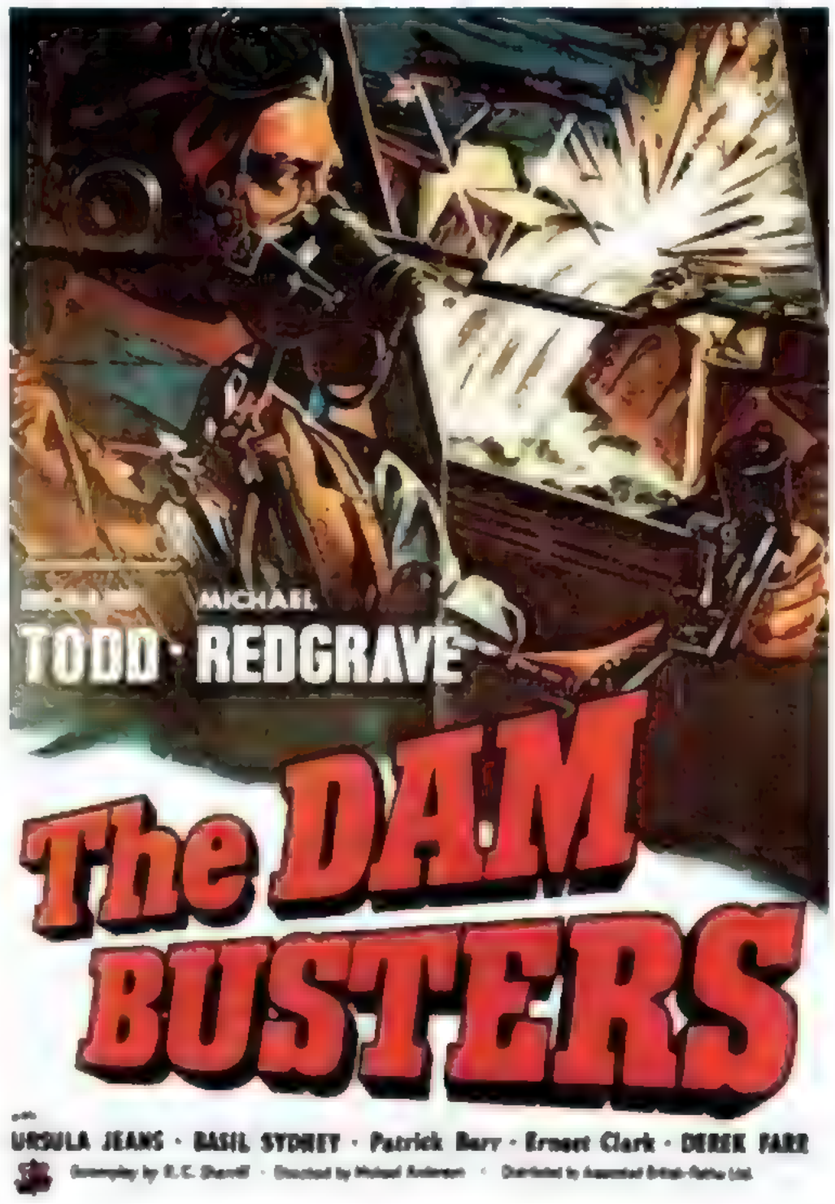
The production company consulted many of the survivors, as well as the next-of-kin of those who had died on this or subsequent missions. They filmed many of the scenes at RAF Scampton, from which 617 Squadron had actually flown in 1943, and at the headquarters of 5 Bombing Group at Grantham, from which the mission had been directed.

The care and attention paid to detail in the film paid off. Most of the central actors playing the flight crews look authentic and feel right for the parts they play. Richard Todd, in the role that helped to make his movie career, was actually 35 years old when he played the 24-year-old Guy Gibson. But he is perfect for the part, and had his own heroic wartime experience to draw on for the role.

Todd had been in the 6th Airborne Division, and had jumped at Pegasus Bridge on D-Day. The scenes in the officers' mess and around RAF Scampton have an authenticity it would be difficult to recapture today, right down to the fact that crews were offered bacon and eggs if flying that night, otherwise it was bread and jam! And most majestically, the producers managed to get four flying Lancaster Mark 7s out of storage from the RAF for the filming.

Despite all this accuracy, the film still managed to get some parts of the story wrong. Barnes Wallis, memorably played by a grey-haired Michael Redgrave, is presented in classic terms as the eccentric inventor whose brilliant idea it was to bomb the dams, but who constantly came up against the brick wall of officialdom. Wallis is portrayed as the bumbling boffin struggling against the grey, unimaginative 'Men from the Ministry' – the individual up against the system. This was a stereotype of British films of the time, whether the inventor was R J Mitchell (of Spitfire fame) or Barnes Wallis.

The record shows, however, this was not the case at all. The idea to disable the Ruhr industrial zone by bombing the dams had been discussed by an Air Ministry committee as early as 1938. The problem was how to generate enough explosive power to destroy dams that were well over 100-feet thick at the base, and 25-feet thick at the top. A standard 500lb bomb would have had no effect whatsoever on such huge structures. ▷




**Below** Richard Todd and Michael Redgrave as Guy Gibson and Barnes Wallis in the film adaptation of the raid.

### GUY GIBSON

Gibson was one of the outstanding fliers in the Royal Air Force. He had been commander of 106 Squadron, and had flown two bomber tours of duty and one night-fighter tour before being selected to command 617 Squadron. He had won the DSO and the DFC twice, and was one of the most highly decorated pilots in Britain. He was thought by many to be cocky and rather arrogant.

Gibson was awarded a VC for leading the Dam Busters Raid, and 33 other decorations were handed out, making 617 the most decorated squadron in the Air Force. Gibson was sent on a lecture tour of the United States, and wrote up his wartime career in *Enemy Coast Ahead*, but was killed before it was published. On 19 September 1944, the Mosquito he was flying crashed in Holland while returning from a raid. He had flown 175 sorties over occupied Europe.

### GUY GIBSON'S DOG

RAF rules did not allow dogs on airfields. However, a blind eye was usually turned when senior officers took their own dogs with them on active service, and Guy Gibson's black Labrador was very popular at RAF Scampton. Gibson used to do tricks with his dog to amuse the men.

In the film, the dog appears many times, padding along loyally behind Richard Todd, as well as in his quarters, and he is referred to by the dog's correct name: 'Nigger'. This has caused some controversy since. In various recent PC versions, shots of the dog have either been removed (making for some bizarre jump-cuts), or Todd has been redubbed calling him 'Trigger'.

'Nigger' is clearly a word that causes offence, but removing the name from recent screenings is surely absurd. It ignores the very different attitudes of the times, and the historical accuracy of the story. In the film, as in reality, Nigger was run over and killed just before the raid. Many members of 617 Squadron saw this as a bad omen.

Barnes Wallis, a much-admired aeronautical engineer, was given a great deal of encouragement to try out his new ideas. He was given permission to use water tanks, to borrow aircraft to drop mock bombs, and, from early 1942, he had access to an actual disused dam, the Nant-y-Gro Dam in mid Wales, to blow up. From this he concluded that a bomb of about 6,500lbs, dropped against the dam wall and detonated at a depth of 30 feet, would generate enough energy to destroy the walls of the dam.

## Boffins and bombers

Certainly there were times when Wallis felt frustrated at the slow speed of progress, but never did official interest in his work dry up. Professor Patrick Blackett, the pioneer of operational research, was a keen supporter. He introduced Wallis to Sir Henry Tizard, Scientific Advisor to the Chief of the Air Staff and Britain's leading aviation scientist of the war, who became another enthusiast for Wallis and his schemes. Neither scientist is portrayed in the film.

At the point at which the proposal to use a bouncing bomb to destroy the dams was taken to the chief of Bomber Command, Arthur Harris, fiction again diverges from fact. The film correctly presents Harris (played brilliantly by Basil Sydney) as a bluff, no-nonsense commander who was sceptical of inventors with new ideas that would risk the lives of his crews. But the film shows Harris coming around to support the idea of the raid, and to admire the brilliant inventor behind it.

In reality, Harris remained hostile to the plan throughout, and he called the bouncing bomb 'the maddest proposition as a weapon that we have yet come across'. He did not like the idea of risking his precious Lancasters and their crews on a precision raid for which the aircraft was not designed, and he saw the whole operation as a major distraction from his policy of destroying the German war economy through area bombing.

Harris jealously guarded Bomber Command's right to select its own targets. He resisted pressure from the Ministry of Economic Warfare, which wanted to bomb the Ruhr dams, regarding them as a key economic target. Eventually, it was only the intervention of the Chief of the Air Staff, Sir Charles Portal, that made the difference. With Churchill's approval, in February 1943, Portal ordered Harris to carry out the raid, to be codenamed 'Operation Chastise'. Accordingly, Harris told the new commander of 5 Group, Air Vice-Marshal Ralph Cochrane, to form a new squadron to carry out the mission. As in the film, however, it was Harris who chose Wing Commander Guy Gibson to lead the squadron.

## Training and technique

From here, the story increased in pace and drama. There were barely eight weeks for Gibson to train his crews in low-level flying. Meanwhile the designer of the Lancaster, Roy Chadwick, and the engineers at A V Roe frantically worked on modifications to the bomb bay so that the Lancasters would be able to carry the bouncing bomb, known by its codename as 'Upkeep'.

Parts of Upkeep were still shrouded in secrecy when the film was made. In the film, the giant bomb is seen as spherical, slung under the Lancaster. In fact, it was cylindrical, more like a huge depth charge or mine, 60 inches in length and 50 inches in diameter, containing 6,600lbs of Torpex explosives. In addition, each aircraft contained a giant rotation system that back-spun the bomb at 500rpm, such that when it hit the water it skimmed along it.

The film imagines a scene in which Gibson takes a rare night off to visit a London theatre, where he gets the idea of using two spotlights to focus on the ground to establish the exact height at which the bomb needs to be dropped. This idea in reality came from Ben Lockspeiser, the director of Scientific Research at the Ministry of Aircraft Production, where experiments had already taken place for using spotlights to establish the optimum height to depth-charge U-boats.

**Below** A still from war classic, *The Dam Busters*.

### GERMAN RECOVERY

The damage caused by the raid was severe. As well as flooding power stations and factories, railway lines had been washed away, and mud and silt were deposited over a huge area. Below the Eder Dam, a Luftwaffe airfield had been flooded, and 25 road and rail bridges had been swept away. The final estimate was that about 1,300 civilians were killed in the flooding, including 500 Ukrainian slave-workers living in the valleys below the dams.

However, German engineers repaired the damage with remarkable speed. Within six weeks, water supplies to the factories of the Ruhr had been fully restored. A massive effort went into repairing the breaches in the Möhne and the Eder dams, and by September they were working almost normally again.

Huge resources had been diverted to the relief operation, and the Germans allocated much needed anti-aircraft weapons to guard assets like dams in the future. But the irony of the most famous raid of the war was that, in the long term, it had an almost negligible effect on the German war effort.

**Left** The breached Möhne Dam, photographed by Flying Officer Jerry Fray of No 542 Squadron from his Spitfire. Six barrage balloons linger above the dam.

But the final scenes of the film are as accurate and dramatic as they were for real. Only a few weeks before Operation Chastise, Wallis said the bombs had to be dropped not from 150 feet but from 60 feet. And changes to the design of the bouncing bomb went on until the last minute.

The operation was scheduled for when the spring waters behind the dams would be at their greatest, and on a clear moonlit night. That put immense pressure on everyone, engineers, bomb-builders, and flight crews, who all had to be ready in a desperately short period. It is a stunning wartime achievement that everything came together in time.

## The attack goes in

On the day of the raid, the crews were finally told the nature of their targets, and were shown terrain models made from aerial photographs by the model-making department of the photo-intelligence centre at RAF Medmenham. For the film, these actual models were used, and Todd tells his crews to 'get every detail of them in your heads until you know them with your eyes shut' – just as Gibson would have instructed the real crews.

When the night comes, 16 May 1943, the film faithfully records the story of the mission. At Elstree Studios, aircraft interiors had been built that moved on a platform as the actors moved the joystick, creating a primitive sort of flight simulator. Aerial film of the route across Holland and Germany, and of flying around the dams, was then back-projected on walls outside the aircraft.

The Derwent reservoir and dam in Derbyshire was used for the dam shots. Michael Anderson, the director, was painstaking in creating the effect he wanted, and filming these sequences took several weeks to make them look right. The film showed that it was only after the fifth bomb had been dropped that the Möhne Dam finally broke up. And it took three bombs to burst the Eder Dam. Though the Scorpe Dam was damaged, it did not break.

The end of the film is far from triumphalist. Eight out of 19 aircraft did not return. The camera lingers in the rooms of the aircrew who never made it back. Gibson does not celebrate, but walks quietly off to write letters to the families of the missing. Harris, however, is elated, and in congratulating Wallis tells him 'now you can sell me a pink elephant'.

The reality was quite different. The 40% loss rate on the mission proved to Harris that Lancasters should not be used for precision operations again. Although other aircraft, particularly the Mosquito, were used for precision raids, the real lesson that Harris took from the raid was the need to maintain his policy of area bombing.

*The Dam Busters* is superbly performed, beautifully shot, edited with tremendous pace, and even most of the special effects still look impressive in a world accustomed to highly sophisticated computer graphics. It stands up well as a fine tribute to the men of 617 Squadron. It is also a great tribute to inventiveness, improvisation, and courage – but with the heroism of the crews played down. It is, in other words, a very British telling of a very British story.

### *THE DAM BUSTERS'* MARCH

Eric Coates, a composer of signature tunes and light music, wrote the famous musical theme for the film. He used a theme he had written before even seeing the film. It has become inextricably associated with the Dam Busters ever since, and is still a popular favourite today. It was also used in two Carling Black Label adverts: one in which a German goalkeeper is seen catching the bouncing bomb, and another where a tourist throws his towel, which bounces across a pool to reserve his deckchair.

### *THE DAM BUSTERS* REMAKE

New Zealand film-maker Peter Jackson has wanted to remake *The Dam Busters* for a long time, and was about to start filming a few years ago, but has since been preoccupied with making *The Hobbit*. A new script has been written by Stephen Fry. David Frost has bought the rights to the Paul Brickhill book, but the new version will apparently feature many aspects of the story that were not known when the original was made. Ten Lancaster models have already been made. Apparently, after much debate, Gibson's dog is to be called 'Digger' in this new version. There is no timetable for its release as yet.

### *THE DAM BUSTERS*

Produced by the Associated British Picture Corporation, based on the book by Paul Brickhill and on Gibson's *Enemy Coast Ahead*, with a script by R C Sherriff. Director in Charge of Production: Robert Clark. Director of Photography and Aerial Photography: Erwin Hillier. Director: Michael Anderson. Starring Michael Redgrave as Barnes Wallis, Richard Todd as Guy Gibson, and Basil Sydney as Arthur Harris. The DVD is distributed by Studio Canal as part of their War Collection.

# Lairds of Battle

The popular image of the Highlander is dominated by the Jacobite clansman: the kilted warrior, brandishing a basket-hilted sword and brass-studded targe. But this tartan-clad Romantic icon has had a longer life on shortbread tins than in reality, argues military historian **Ross Cowan**.

Until the late 17th century, Highland chiefs and their gentlemen retainers charged into battle fully armoured. They loosed arrows from longbows, and cut down their enemies with axes and two-handed swords.

It was not poverty, nor a rejection of modern technology, that made them retain their Medieval arsenal. The traditional weapons were brutally effective in close combat, and their use was central to the hierarchical structure and heroic ethos of the Gaelic world. Thus, aristocratic warriors put aside their guns and duelled with bows and two-handed swords, and their bards sang of the most dreadful and glorious deeds. As the rest of Britain entered the modern era, the Highlands were at the height of their heroic age.

## Exemplars of valour

This Homeric world was fostered in the halls of lairds and chiefs, where bards, harpists, pipers, and other musicians provided entertainment and education. Men like the MacMhuirichs, hereditary bards and historians to the Clanranald, and Iain Lom, bard to MacDonald of Keppoch, were at the top of the bardic tree.

MacDonald poets never tired of boasting of their clan's descent from Conn of the Hundred Battles, while the Campbells claimed not only Diarmid of

**Above** Ben Rinnes looms above the battlefield of Glen Livet, where Lachlan Mor MacLean of Duart held his ground and captured the standard of the Earl of Huntly (1594).

Photos: © Ivy Cowan

**Main image** Sron a Clachain reflected in a pool at Killin. It was the scene of a sharp skirmish between the MacDonalds of Keppoch and Campbells of Glenorchy in 1640. Local tradition maintains that superior archery slowed the uphill advance of the Campbells and allowed the MacDonalds to retreat into Glen Lochay.

**Above** The tartan icon. Portrait of the teenaged Lord Mungo Murray by John Michael Wright, *c*.1683. Murray had the misfortune to be defeated by the Frasers at Aultnagoire in 1698, the last clan-versus-clan battle. In Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum, Glasgow.

**Left** Detail of the armour-bearer in the background of Mungo Murray's portrait. He carries his master's longbow and appears to have a targe (round shield) strapped to his back.

Photos: © Ross Cowan

the Fenian cycles as their ancestor, but also King Arthur.

Lacking illustrious forebears from Irish and British myth, the MacLeans invoked heroes from the historic past. 'Fierce Red Hector of the hard-fought battles', killed fighting for the Lord of the Isles at Harlaw (1411), was one such exemplar. When Lachlan Mor MacLean of Duart hewed the enemy with a battle-axe at Glen Livet (1594), his choice of weapon was probably influenced by the knowledge that Gilleain, the 13th-century progenitor of the MacLeans, habitually carried an axe.

On account of his plotting and violent expansionism, Lachlan Mor was a divisive character in his own lifetime, but his courage was never in doubt, and he figured as a paradigm of valour in later Gaelic and Scots literature. He was one of the few chiefs in Argyll's army to emerge with distinction from the débâcle at Glen Livet (1594), and his deeds were prominent in reports compiled by Robert Bowes, the agent of Elizabeth I in Scotland.

While the rest of the Highland army fled in disarray, Lachlan Mor's contingent held firm, and he even captured the standard of the Earl of Huntly. According to Calderwood's history, 'MacLaine has played one of the most valiant men that ever Highland man played… Having a jack upon him and two habergeons [i.e. a fabric coat reinforced with metal plates and two coats of mail], with a morion [helmet] and a Danish axe, he perceived Huntly's standard, played so valiantly with the axe, that he slew four or five until the time he came to Huntly's standard, and sticked the horse whereupon the bearer rode, and next cut him in two at the waist and bore the standard away. This his enemies confess.'

## Bards on the battlefield

Bards accompanied raiding parties and armies, and harangued clan warriors before battle. Martin Martin, a Skye man who toured the Western Isles in the 1690s, explains how a bard would find 'an eminence from whence he addressed himself to all of them standing about him, putting them in mind of ▷

**Above** The Red Book of Clanranald, a 17th-century repository of Clan Donald history and poetry compiled by the bard Neil MacMhuirich. In the National Museum of Scotland, Edinburgh.

**Above** Coire na Creiche at the foot of the Cuillins in Skye. The site of a famous MacDonald victory over the MacLeods in 1601, it was commemorated in song by the warrior-poet Donald MacIain VicSheumais.

**Above right** The 15th-century graveslab of a MacNicol at Skeabost on Skye. The warrior wears a conical bascinet helmet, pisane (head and shoulder guard of mail), and aketon (padded fabric coat). Such Medieval armour was still used by some Highlanders in the 1670s and 1680s.

what great things were performed by the valour of their ancestors, raised their hopes with the noble rewards of honour and victory, and dispelled their fears by all the topics that natural courage could suggest.'

It was also the duty of the bard to find a good vantage point from which to observe a battle, and to witness and record the glorious deeds of his clansmen. Iain Lom did so at Inverlochy (1645). His song about the battle elevated Alasdair MacColla (a MacDonald) to the status of a Gaelic demi-god. 'Alasdair of the sharp cleaving blades' ensured the slaughter of a despised enemy: 'well was the ground manured… by the blood of Campbells.'

MacColla's skill in arms at the subsequent Battle of Auldearn resulted in another panegyric, but in 1647 he was killed in Ireland and the hero worship was replaced by lament. Iain Lom was devastated when confirmation of the rumour of Alasdair's death came from a harpist returning from a tour of the bardic circuit in Ireland.

Iain Lom was not merely an observer of combat. He fought in the skirmish at Sron a Clachain (1640), where he saw his father killed and Angus, son of the Keppoch chief, mortally wounded. Lom's grief was intense, but he never lost his appreciation for the glory of victorious combat. His poems and songs revel in the graphic details of sword-fighting. Limbs are severed and sinews cut, skulls are cleaved and crushed. Blood flows copiously and marrow leaks from broken bones.

> He came to Huntly's standard, and sticked the horse whereupon the bearer rode, and next cut him in two at the waist and bore the standard away.

Poetry was not the preserve of professional bards. Donald MacIain VicSheumais (another MacDonald) was a noted warrior-poet. Victor of the skirmish at Carinish, and participant in the resulting full-scale battle between the MacDonalds and MacLeods at Coire na Creiche (1601), MacIain commemorated the latter engagement in verse: 'Ill-luck befell the men of long locks… Clan Donald was responsible for their overwhelming.' In another composition he regrets having gifted 'three heroes' to his unworthy son-in-law – a MacLeod! The three heroes were a coat of mail, a helmet, and a sword. The sword was probably of the two-handed variety. Gaelic tradition recalls that MacIain's own blade was called 'The Ribald Peregrine'.

**Left** The funerary monument of Alasdair Crotach MacLeod (d. 1547) includes an effigy of the chief in full plate armour, and a relief, shown here, of him in more typical Highland panoply of bascinet, mail hauberk, and padded aketon. Note the long-handled axe.

## Warriors and 'clowns'

This was a warrior's world. But only the well-born could be warriors. The glory of combat and profits of plunder were for chiefs, *fine* and *daoin-uaisle* (clan gentry), and their retainers.

The Highland straths and glens sustained considerable populations, but the majority of manpower was tied to the land. The militarism of some clans was underpinned by a servile class known as *bodaich* (serfs or, pejoratively, clowns). The contempt of the *daoin-uaisle* class for the *bodaich* was expressed in Gaelic poetry, which is virtually the only source for their existence.

Iain Lom noted that the noble line of Angus Og of Glengarry was not tainted by *bodaich* ancestry. As late as 1746, the fugitive Jacobite officer Iain Roy Stewart was appalled that Strathspey *bodaich* were involved in the hunt for him. They were 'evil serfs without honour or worth'. Hector MacLeod, another Jacobite, depicted *bodaich* as fit only to cleanse the battlefield and bury the dead.

The contempt of the clan gentry extended to their Lowland Scottish opponents. Angus MacAlasdair Roy, the bard of Glen Coe, was dispirited that well-born Highland warriors were 'felled by bullets fired by cowherds' at the Battle of Dunkeld (1689). The lowly 'cowherds' were soldiers of the Earl of Angus' regiment, later known as 'the Cameronians'.

## War bands and armies

'Grey' Colin Campbell of Glenorchy was a powerful chieftain. With lands extending from Lorn on the West Coast to the east end of Loch Tay at the very heart of Scotland, he could have raised a large army from his tenants and dependents. But when conducting a war against rebellious MacGregor vassals in the 1560s, he preferred to reinforce his *daoin-uaisle* and retainers (a corps greatly diminished by the revolt of the highly militarised Clan Gregor) with Cameron mercenaries. He also browbeat the Earl of Argyll, his clan chief and feudal superior (contrary to popular belief, the feudal system operated throughout the Gaelic regions of Scotland), into supplying him with levies of infantry and even light cavalry, a rarity in the Highlands.

The Cameron mercenaries proved impossible to control, plundering ▷

## ARMING FOR WAR IN THE AGE OF FORAYS

From the collapse of the MacDonald Lordship of the Isles in 1493 to the skirmish between Athollmen and Frasers at Aultnagoire in 1698, some part of the Highlands and Islands of Scotland was always embroiled in clan warfare. James IV could have been the man to fully integrate the Gaelic-speaking regions into the Kingdom of Scotland, but he and his principal Highland allies were slaughtered at Flodden in 1513. The power-vacuum left by the dissolution of the MacDonald Lordship and by King James' death and succession by a minor propelled the Highlands into 'the Age of Forays'.

With no effective central authority, Campbells, MacLeans, MacKenzies, the feuding branches of the once mighty Clan Donald, and a host of lesser clans sought to expand their lands and influence. Political and religious discord in the rest of Scotland (acute since the Reformation of 1559-1560) allowed the Highlanders to conduct their affairs with little interference. James VI's attempts to disarm and demilitarise the clans had limited effect. High casualties in the British Civil Wars of 1637-1650, and the Cromwellian occupation of Scotland (1650-1660), did hinder military activity within the Highlands, but a generation of recovery allowed the clans to reassert their strength.

The Battle of Mulroy (1688) and the first Jacobite Rebellion (1689-1690) were the last hurrahs of the Medieval modes of Highland warfare. MacDonald gentlemen brought their yew bows to Mulroy, and MacLeod bowmen mustered at Dalcomera (1689). Many of the notable chiefs and lairds at Killiecrankie, including Cameron of Lochiel, fought in armour. Some still used two-handed swords and battle-axes. The efficacy of 'archaic' arms and armour is demonstrated by the subsequent Battle at Dunkeld: Lowland soldiers found that halberds were more effective than muskets against the armour and targes of Highland gentlemen.

**1.** A powder horn (*c*1660) showing a Highland gentleman and his retainer hunting, an activity considered useful as training for war. They wear doublets and trews, more typical attire in this period than the famous kilt, and note the long dirk (dagger), an ever-present side-arm. In the National Museum of Scotland, Edinburgh.

**2.** Late 16th-century helmet from Ancrum. Cabasset- and morion-type helmets were popular throughout Scotland. Morions were worn by Lachlan MacLean at Glen Livet, and by the Clanranald gentlemen who joined Montrose and MacColla in 1644. In the National Museum of Scotland, Edinburgh.

**3.** Detail of jack, showing the mark made by a bullet on the right breast. At Glen Livet (1594), two plates of the jack worn by Gordon of Gight were driven into his body by bullet strikes.

**4.** Scottish fabric jack dating to the 16th century. Metal or horn plates were sewn in between the layers of fabric. Lachlan Mor MacLean wore a jack under two coats of mail at Glen Livet in 1594. In the National Museum of Scotland, Edinburgh.

## SLAUGHTER SWORDS

The distinctive two-handed sword popularly, but erroneously, known as 'the claymore' appeared in the 1490s and remained the principal weapon of the Highland gentleman until the early 17th century. Combat with the two-handed sword was fast and fluid. Relatively light and well-balanced (weights of surviving examples range from 1.8kg to 2.6kg), it was sometimes used in conjunction with a small, round shield (targe or buckler).

The English, who had much experience of fighting Highland mercenaries in Ireland, knew the two-hander as the 'slaughter sword'. Clan historians took great pleasure in recording – and no doubt exaggerating – the number of kills achieved with the weapon.

The Manuscript History of Craignish recounts how Ronald Campbell of Barrichbeyan avenged his brother's death by slaying 16 Shaws with his two-handed sword (1602). Another Campbell tradition accorded no less than 23 kills to the two-handed sword (albeit of Continental rather than Highland pattern) of Patrick Campbell of Inverneill in a skirmish against the MacGregors at Killin (1623).

The slaughter sword was superseded in the 1630s by the basket-hilted broad- or backsword (the latter being the favourite of Alasdair MacColla), but Rory MacLennan, the Bannerman of Kintail, bravely defended his standard at Auldearn with a two-handed sword in 1645.

Some of MacLeod of Assynt's broken men carried bows and two-handed swords in 1669. Along with bascinet helmets and full plate armour, the two-handed sword was noted among the unusual equipment of Charles II's 'Highland Host' militia in 1678, and the weapon reappears in the hands of some chiefs in the Killiecrankie campaign of 1689.

Some two-handed swords were converted into basket-hilted swords. For example, a MacGregor two-hander used in the rout of the Colquhouns at Glen Fruin (1603) was cut down and re-hilted in 1745 for a MacGregor who joined Bonnie Prince Charlie. Other two-handed swords were retained as heirlooms. When Richard Pococke visited the Isle of Tiree in 1760, he discovered that the inhabitants still handed down 'from father to son the large two-handed sword and the helmet of the family'.

**Right** An early 16th-century two-handed sword of Highland-type. The sword's total length is 148.6cm; the blade is 111.8cm long. Weighing 2.6kg, it is one of the heaviest examples of the type. In the National Museum of Scotland, Edinburgh.

**Below** Detail of the characteristic cross guard of a Highland two-handed sword, with sloping quillons and quatrefoil terminals. In Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum, Glasgow.

neighbouring estates and even making a dawn raid on a camp of allied Athollmen. The command of proud and arrogant gentlemen from disparate clans was always difficult: they tended to obey only the captain nominated by their chief, and were quick to take offence from outsiders. However, 'broken men', that is outlaws and those exiled or runaway from clans (perhaps including the normally despised *bodaich*), were easier to cajole. In 1669, MacLeod of Assynt recruited 400 broken men and formed them into a regiment.

Difficulties of command and the desire to have forces composed of the 'right sort' of men meant that most clan battles were small-scale affairs involving scores or hundreds of warriors. The Battle of Glen Fruin (1603), where 400 MacGregors and allies outmanoeuvred and defeated 800 or 900 Colquhouns, Buchanans, and Dumbarton townsmen, was a notably large engagement.

In 1604, Robert Campbell of Glen Falloch (a grandson of Grey Colin) cornered a band of MacGregors on the slopes of Ben Toig. The forces involved in this skirmish were more typical: 60 MacGregors against Robert's 200 'chosen men', drawn from the gentlemen of the Campbells, MacNabs, Camerons, and Clanranald. Sometimes, however, a great chief could raise a large army from his clan, feudal vassals, and those obliged to serve him by bonds of man-rent.

In 1594, acting on behalf of James VI, the young Earl of Argyll mustered an exceptional army of 8,000 footmen. Many were heavily armed and armoured in the classic Highland style, but the host proved unwieldy and was put to flight by a much smaller force of cavalry led by the rebellious Catholic Earls of Huntly and Errol.

Ewen Cameron of Lochiel, chief of a smaller clan but an influential man on account of his personal charisma and all-important feats of valour (such as using his teeth to tear out the throat of a Cromwellian officer in 1654), was able to gather 1,200 men to oppose the

Ewen Cameron was an influential man on account of all-important feats of valour, such as using his teeth to tear out the throat of a Cromwellian officer in 1654.

**Left** Glen Fruin. In 1603, 400 MacGregors and their allies divided into two forces and trapped an army of 800-900 Colquhouns, Buchanans, and Dumbarton townsmen. The MacGregors were equipped with morions, habergeons, two-handed swords, bows, and guns.

**Top right** 'Grey' Colin Campbell (d. 1583) in a 'white harness' of plate armour and grasping a two-handed sword. From the Black Book of Taymouth, a family history of the Glenorchy Campbells compiled in the first half of the 17th century.

**Right** Duncan Campbell of Loch Awe (centre), 15th-century progenitor of the leading Campbell kindreds of Argyll and Glenorchy, depicted in the Black Book of Taymouth in a mail habergeon, a type of armour still popular in the 17th century.

Images: © RHC Archive

MacIntoshes at the Fords of Arkaig in 1665. Even at this late date, one quarter of Cameron's force was armed with bows.

This weapon still had the edge over muskets in 'rate of fire'. Donald MacIain VicSheumais' famous destruction of a larger force of MacLeod raiders at Carinish (1601), and the successful withdrawal of the MacDonalds from the slopes of Sron a Clachain (1640), were accomplished by superior archery, and Cromwellian soldiers were greatly troubled by Royalist Highland archers directed by Ewen Cameron at the Battle of Tullich (1652). The use of the bow in this late period was also influenced by its manly and heroic associations. It was a key weapon in what scholars now call 'the Gaelic panegyric code'. It seems that Archibald Campbell of Craignish was well aware of that code.

## Heroic weapons

'Expert at breaking castles asunder' was one of the many epithets bestowed on Alasdair MacColla by Iain Lom. However, MacColla's success in capturing Covenanter and Campbell strongholds was mixed, and when unable to take Craignish Castle by storm, he abandoned the siege (1646). Throughout the three weeks it lasted, Archibald Campbell, tutor (acting laird) of Craignish, conducted a spirited defence. He led numerous sorties against the besiegers, and challenged MacColla to single combat.

MacColla declined. He perhaps recalled how the morale of a Highland force had collapsed when its commander, Alasdair MacDonald (son of the famous Sorley Boy), was seriously wounded in single combat against the renowned English officer Captain Merriman at Dunluce in 1585.

Unable to tempt Alasdair MacColla into a battle of champions, Archibald Campbell determined to kill him from a distance. While MacColla was directing an assault against the castle, Archibald appeared on the battlements and loosed an arrow from a bow. It struck Alasdair in the lower body and, according to a Gaelic tale about the siege, 'caused greater laceration coming out than going in'. Alasdair then decided to abandon the siege, memorably declaring, 'That is the sharp castle of whelks; the wind itself is the only thing that will keep up a constant fight with it.'

After three weeks of siege, it is possible Archibald had exhausted his supply of powder and shot, but it seems likely that his use of the bow was influenced by the heroic ethos of the Gaelic world. Similarly, when Hector MacLean of Lochbuie hurled a javelin at dragoons at Knockbrecht (1689), it was probably a symbolic gesture intended to attract bardic attention. His men fired muskets prior to following their chief in a running charge with drawn swords.

Highlanders adapted quickly to firearms, and Lowland Scottish gunsmiths developed distinctive weapons to appeal to Gaelic gentlemen. Some 16th-century chiefs even deployed light artillery in battle. But the gun was never considered a truly heroic weapon. Mastery of the musket did not require the same levels of skill and strength demanded by the bow, and unlike swordsmen, musketeers did not fight 'breast to breast' (Iain Lom).

This explains why, in the famous Highland charges at Killiecrankie (1689) and Prestonpans (1745), the clan gentry dropped their expensive firearms after firing a single volley, and then set to the more glorious form of combat with their swords. Of course, armour-bearers would have immediately gathered up the discarded guns.

The seemingly irresistible Highland charge was finally halted at Culloden (1746) by a combination of rough terrain, artillery, musket volleys, and disciplined bayonet drill. 'The Lowlanders' fire / Showered shot around our faces / That spoiled the swordplay, more's the pity.' Such was the lament of Iain Roy Stewart, Jacobite, poet, despiser of the *bodaich*, and last of the lairds of battle.

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Dr Ross Cowan** is an independent scholar and the author of six books about the Roman Army, including *For the Glory of Rome: a history of warriors and warfare* and *Roman Legionary, AD 69-161.*

# BATTLEFIELD

## Entente Cordiale Battlefield Tours

Entente Cordiale Battlefield Tours has developed themed WWI battlefield tours to key destinations on the Western Front. We also offer bespoke WWI battlefield tours that can be arranged as a personal journey for families or groups of friends or colleagues. Tours are available for larger groups, including school and college parties, army, and territorial units.

First World War battlefield tours can be planned, arranged, and tailored around your party's requirements. We will visit places of special interest and locations off the beaten track as well as the most popular sites on the Western Front. Your guide will help you to interpret the landscape and look for signs of battle evidence today. WWI tours last for between one and six days (or more if required). The atmosherere is friendly and informal. You will stay in quality accommodation and enjoy good food and hospitality. We are particular specialists in guiding visitors from New Zealand, Australia, and Canada.

**TEL:** 01244 341920
**WEB:** ***www.ententecordialetours.co.uk***

**AVAILABLE TOURS:**

**In The Footsteps of The Early BEF** – the retreat to Mons and the Battle of The Marne
**Harry Patch 'the Last Tommy'** – Ypres, Passchendaele and Poperinge
**The AEF** – Australian sites including Fromelles
**The Canadians** – Vimy Ridge, The Somme, and Ypres
**Kitchener's Pals** – The Somme
**The Americans in France**
**Victory** – the last months of World War I in France and Belgium

## Guided Battlefield Tours

Our success has been based on providing our guests with a quality, personal experience at a reasonable price. Our group sizes are limited on each scheduled tour. You will be accompanied by a specialist guide who will be aware of any special interest that you have discussed with us. Our guides will place sites in a proper historical context, in addition to bringing each site to life in terms of the experiences of men who served there.

We are happy to talk to you about the military service of relatives and can give you advice on how to undertake your own research or offer the services of our researcher. Our tours are inspired by a passion for history and a deep appreciation of the sacrifice of past generations. We ensure that all our guests experience the battlefields in an atmosphere of respect and remembrance.

We offer a range of WWI and WWII tours in Northern Europe. The cost of the tours include all travel from the point of pick up, bed and breakfast accommodation in 3* hotels, and bottled water each day, in addition to tea and coffee and entry to all museums. There are no hidden costs. Our 2014 dates are now available for booking. Details of our tours are on our website. Please telephone us if you have any questions or email us to receive a brochure.

**TEL:** 01633 258207
**EMAIL:** info@guidedbattlefieldtours.co.uk
**WEB:** ***www.guidedbattlefieldtours.co.uk***

**AVAILABLE TOURS:**

**Treading in Tommy's Footsteps**
**Recalling the Somme**
**Chapters from the Western Front**
**Ypres Remembered**
**Battles of 1917-1918**
**The Forgotten Front**
**Poets at War 1914-1918**
**Walking the Somme Battlefields**
**Normandy and the D Day Landings**
**Dunkirk**
**The Battle of Arnhem** – Operation Market Garden

## The Battlefields Trust

The Battlefields Trust is the UK charity dedicated to the preservation and interpretation of Britain's historic battlefields. It is perhaps best known for its recent ground-breaking work in locating the true site of the Battle of Bosworth. Readers may well have seen some of the information boards it has helped to erect at battlefields all across the country. This year's programme includes Ray Wilkinson's tour around two of Kent's most important battlefields; Maidstone 1648 where Fairfax won a crucial victory over the Royalists and the Medway, the possible site of one of the most significant battles in British history when the invading Roman Legions defeated the Britons under Caratacus. A weekend of re-enactment events at Naseby Village Hall and playing fields is taking place in June, with the Sealed Knot, Vikings, and the Medieval Siege Society.

You are advised to consider becoming a member – as well as enjoying the above benefits, including a choice of over 30 events all around the country, you'll also be making a real contribution to the protection and preservation of Britain's battlefield heritage. Annual membership starts at £18 per person. For a membership form, to join online, and for more information on the work of this excellent organisation visit our website.

**WEB:** ***www.battlefieldstrust.com***

**AVAILABLE TOURS:**

Guided tours have been organised studying the Battle of Upton, the Battle of Ripple, and the Battle of Nibley Green. Dr Peter Burley and Mike Elliott will be leading a walk around Medieval St Albans, and Dr Christopher Duffy will be delivering a lecture on *Redcoats and Highlanders: the Jacobite Rebellions.*

# TOURS

There are a select number of battlefield tours that every military history enthusiast should experience. Here we list seven of the finest, most reasonably priced, worldwide tours available.

## Holts Battlefields and History Tours

Although much has changed in the world of travel since the first Holts Tour, more than 30 years ago, visiting places of historic interest remains a most rewarding experience. Our 2013 programme is packed with the usual wide variety of tours. As always, popular regular tours such as It's A Long Way To Tipperary, Dunkirk to D-Day and Waterloo are featured, as are anniversary tours Napoleon In Germany, Gettysburg, Dambusters, Kursk and Sicily. These days it is often not clear what you are getting for your money; we have always thought it important that there are no hidden costs, and so much is included in the price that each tour represents excellent value for money. We are fully bonded with ABTA and ATOL for your protection. If you would like to receive our 2013 Battlefields and History brochure, please telephone our office or request a brochure via our website.

**TEL:** 01293 865000
**WEB:** ***www.holts.co.uk***
**AVAILABLE TOURS:**
**The Zulu War:** 19th April – 2nd May 2013
**The Making of London:** 27th – 29th April 2013
**Dambusters 70th Anniversary:** 15th - 19th May 2013
**Walking the Five Battles of Ypres:** 7th – 10th June 2013
**The American Civil War 1863 – Battle of Gettysburg**
**150th Anniversary:** 1st – 9th July 2013
**The Battle of Kursk – 1943:** 10th – 15th August 2013
**The Eastern Front 1914-1921 :** 24th – 30th August 2013
**Napoleon in Germany 1813:** 18th – 22nd October 2013

## Waterloo Battlefield Tours

Talan Lindsey, who has lived close to the battlefield and studied it for 20 years, takes small groups or individuals over the three battlefields of Waterloo, Quatre Bras, and Ligny. The march of events, the dominant personalities, the manoeuvres of each army, and the actions of individual soldiers, coloured by the weather conditions and the influence of the terrain are all revealed with humour and insight.

- Each tour is organised according to your requirements and special interests.
- Transport for up to four passengers is included.

We recommend our clients to stay in Waterloo which is has many first class hotels and restaurants.

**Alan Lindsey**
**TEL:** +32 10 41 08 40
**MOB:** +32 (0)475 616 646
**EMAIL:** alanlindsey7@gmail.com

**WEB:** ***www.waterloobattlefieldtours.com***

**AVAILABLE TOURS:**
Visits include the Wellington Museum, Le Caillou, Hougoumont, the Lion Mound, Plançenoit and more.

## African Battlefields

South African Battlefields tours study the classical Victorian Military expeditions of the Anglo Zulu war and Anglo Boer Battlefields in KwaZulu Natal of 19th Century British colonial Africa. Walk the iconic battlefields from when the British first crossed the Buffalo River, and follow the trail of the biggest military reverse ever inflicted on the British army at the spears of the native Zulu force at the battle of Isandhlwana.
These tours will also take you around the Anglo-Boer battlefields, stopping at the siege towns of Ladysmith, the killing fields of Spionkop, the site where a young Winston Churchill witnessed the train ambush, and the British HQ of Melrose House in Pretoria where the peace accord was signed on 31 May 1902.

**TEL:** +27 83 448 6898
**EMAIL:** info@africatravelservices.co.za
**WEB:** ***www.africatravelservices.co.za***

**AVAILABLE TOURS:**
Anglo Zulu Battlefields
Anglo Boer Zulu Battlefields
Anglo Boer Zulu Battlefields and
Kruger Park Safari
Please refer to website for combined tour options

## Rifleman Tours

Rifleman Tours brings the battlefield back to life and conveys the thoughts, perspectives, and experiences of all those who fought during WWI and WWII from the General to the humble Tommy.

Run by husband and wife team Tony and Allison Eden they provide battlefield tours of an extremely high quality along with a high level of personal service. From first time visitors to history students, tours cater for groups of 12 to 18 people of all ages, providing a relaxed, friendly, and informal atmosphere.

Tony's grandfather, Rifleman William James Eden of the King's Royal Rifle Corps, was killed at the first battle of Ypres and is remembered on the Menin Gate, which has fuelled Tony's passion for the battlefields. Over the years Tony has taken guests on personal pilgrimages to the graves of loved ones as well as helping trace their specific involvement in the conflict.

Visit our website, read our testimonials, and for the perfect tour of remembrance, choose Rifleman Tours. Lest We Forget.

**TEL:** 01908 617264
**WEB:** ***www.riflemantours.co.uk***

**AVAILABLE TOURS:**
**Somme and Ypres Salient including 'Behind the Lines'** – 21 June 2013
**The Somme** – 5 July 2013
**Loos and the Ypres Salient** – 6 September 2013
**Mons and the Ypres Salient** – 25 October 2013
**Normandy and the D-Day Beaches** – 13 June and 18 July 2013
Private tours can be arranged.
Please view our website for 2014 Centenary Tours.

NASSER'S ROCKETS

# Egypt's missiles

**Main image** President Gamal Abdel Nasser of Egypt arrives at Tashkent Airport in Uzbekistan on an official visit. The West German scientists developing his missiles were tracked down, harassed, and intimidated by Israel's secret service.

**Bottom right** A popular and charismatic leader, Nasser became a nationalist icon among Egyptians and Arabs with the anti-Western stance he took following his 1952 coup.

On a dark, bitterly cold night in February 1963 a 48-year-old German scientist was driving home along a lonely road outside the Bavarian town of Loerrach when a car suddenly pulled out in front, forcing him to make an emergency stop.

Stunned and startled, Dr Hans Kleinwachter barely had time to react before he saw a man jumping out and walking towards him, brandishing a revolver. 'Where is the home of Dr Schenker?', shouted the assailant. An instant later there was a sudden loud crash as a bullet shattered the windscreen and lodged itself in the scientist's thick woollen muffler. The assassin pulled the trigger again, but this time his weapon jammed. He turned and ran back to the waiting car, which sped off seconds later. Kleinwachter narrowly survived.

Back home, the shaken scientist was trying hard to steady his nerves when the phone rang. The caller, speaking French, did not give his name but had a stark and chilling message. 'Those who feed on Jews,' he stated curtly, 'choke on them'.

Kleinwachter knew exactly who his attackers were. They were members of a *kidon* (assassination unit) dispatched by Israel's secret service, Mossad, and tasked with harassing, intimidating, and, if necessary, killing a group of West German scientists. Many were former Nazis. They were playing a vital part in a top-secret Egyptian programme to build long-range rockets capable of striking Israel.

# OPERATION DAMOCLES AND NASSER'S NAZI WMDS

Having narrowly survived the Suez Crisis in 1956, Egypt's President took drastic measures to protect his vulnerable regime. **Roger Howard** investigates.

## Nasser's agenda

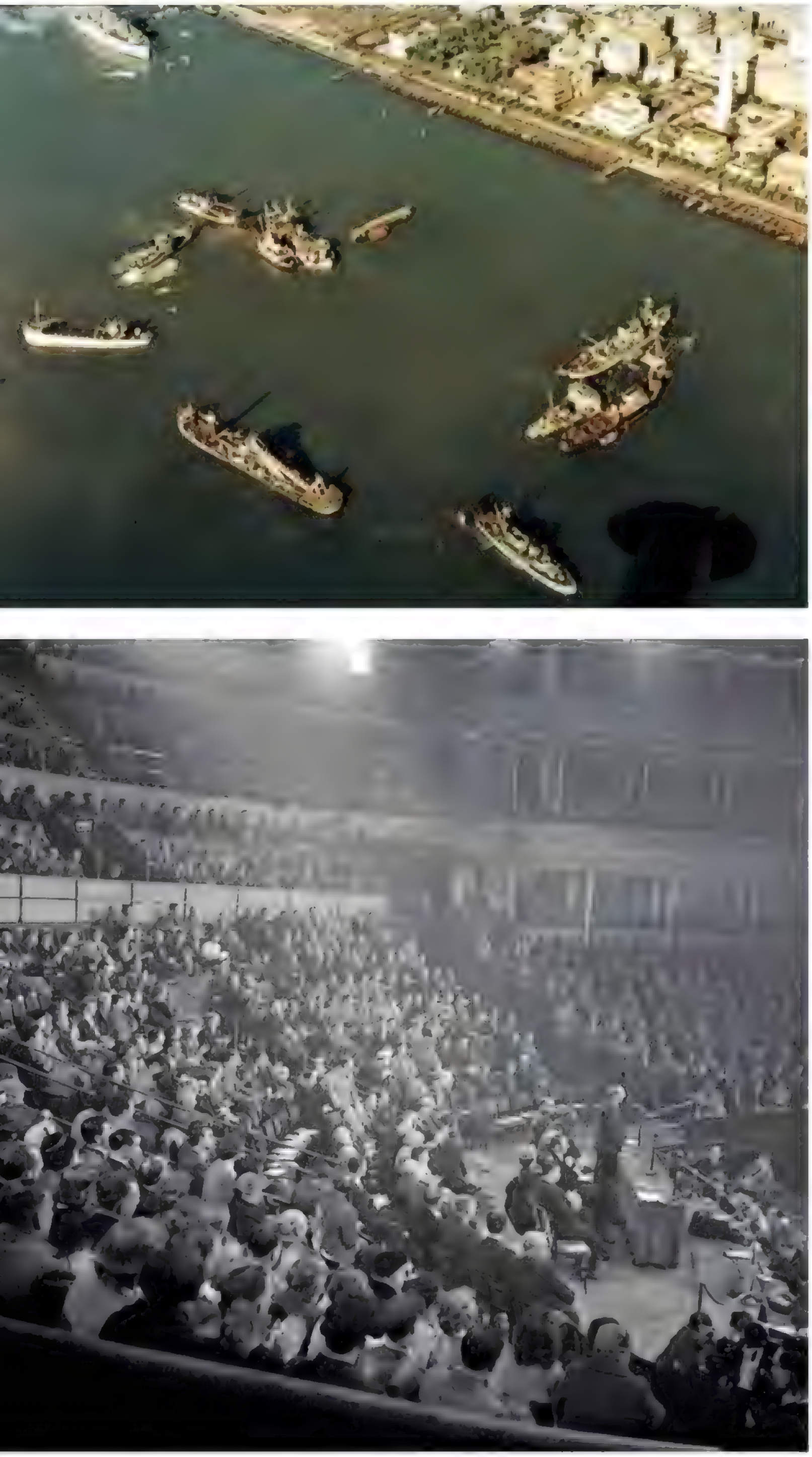
The man at the heart of Egypt's rocket programme was its supremely charismatic and populist leader, President Gamal Abdel Nasser. By 1963 the 45-year-old president had been head of state for nearly a decade. With a group of fellow 'Free Officers', he had instigated a military coup in July 1952 to topple the British-backed monarchy.

The coup was one in a series of similar events that convulsed the Middle East in the two decades after the 1948 Arab-Israeli War that had resulted in the creation of the State of Israel. The relative stability of the region was shattered by this event. A string of corrupt and reactionary Arab monarchies had been exposed as hollow façades. Their ramshackle, demoralised armies had crashed to defeat, their governments were self-evidently propped up by the Western powers, and their economies were dominated by foreign multinationals.

A wave of Arab nationalism swept across the Middle East. Typically, it was led by middle-class army officers. Equally typically, when the officers acted, they won enthusiastic popular support on the Arab streets. Nasser in particular became an icon of the nationalist cause, not just for Egyptians, but for Arabs across the region.

Nasser's belligerent anti-Western and anti-Zionist rhetoric was sometimes matched by radical deeds – notably by his nationalisation of the Suez Canal Company, in open defiance of Western governments and shareholders, in July 1956. Here, the aspiration of Egypt's new leaders to build an independent state meshed with the instinctive anti-imperialist sentiment among ordinary Arabs. But it provoked a fierce reaction from the Western powers.

Britain and France combined with Israel in the 1956 Arab-Israeli War in an attempt to wrest back control of the Suez Canal. But the United States, harbouring ▷



**Top** Egyptian wrecks blocking the Suez Canal at Port Said in December 1956. Having provoked Britain, France, and Israel, Nasser survived what was nearly a crushing military defeat thanks only to political intervention from the United States.
**Above** A meeting in the Albert Hall in London in October 1956 to protest against Nasser's actions preceding the Suez Crisis.

The events of 1956 revealed that the Arab military weakness exposed in 1948 had not been made good.

its own geopolitical ambitions in the Middle East, threatened to cut off financial support to the beleaguered post-war British economy, and the Western military action was terminated short of its objectives.

Nasser survived what might otherwise have been a crushing military defeat. The events of 1956 revealed that the Arab military weakness so cruelly exposed in 1948 had not been made good. Arab nationalist regimes like that of Nasser in Egypt remained vulnerable. The Egyptian missile programme was born out of this perception.

A battery of long-range missiles might provide an effective deterrent against future aggression by either the Israelis or the Western powers. Israel was rumoured to be developing nuclear weapons. An Egyptian long-range missile capability – one with the range to strike Tel Aviv, Haifa, and other Israeli cities – might provide some sort of security against this emerging threat. Soviet-supplied aircraft might be shot down attempting attacks on Israel; but there was nothing at the time likely to have been effective against incoming ballistic missiles.

## The rocket programme

Towards the end of 1957, President Nasser began to organise a highly ambitious, and very expensive, ballistic missile programme. Agents were despatched to Western Europe to procure the highly specialised engineering components, manufactured mainly in West Germany, and dummy companies were set up to smuggle them out of the country.

Head-hunters went in search of the scientists with specialised knowledge and experience. Adverts were placed in newspapers – 'Aeronautical industry in North Africa requires specialists' was typical – and visits were made to leading research centres, universities,

**Above** On an Egyptian national holiday, 21 July 1962, it was announced that long-range rockets (such as the above) had been successfully and accurately test-fired in the desert. The Egyptian public were ecstatic.
**Inset** After the war, German scientist Wolfgang Pilz fell into British hands. He was ordered to develop sophisticated surface-to-air missiles codenamed *Wasserfall* (shown in the photograph) for the top-secret Operation Backfire. Towards the end of the 1950s, however, he was one of Nasser's star recruits.

and technical colleges. Promises were made of large tax-free salaries, luxurious apartments, and perfect weather.

The head-hunters got a strong response from former Nazi scientists who had failed to find professional fulfilment in post-war Europe. The main contributor, and the biggest name in the programme, was Eugen Sänger, a far-sighted engineering genius whose visionary wartime projects had included the *Amerika Bomber*, a long-range warplane designed to cross the Atlantic at supersonic speeds to bomb the US mainland.

Another star recruit was Wolfgang Pilz. Described by contemporaries as 'a propulsion expert who has deep blue eyes and the wavy silver hair of a matinée idol', Pilz certainly looked the part of the German scientist. He began his career at Peenemunde, where he was probably involved in efforts to develop the highly sophisticated surface-to-air missiles that were codenamed *Wasserfall* ('Waterfall'). After the war he fell into British hands and was then ordered to participate in Operation Backfire, the top-secret launching of V2 rockets from Germany's North Sea coast.

Other notable figures were Paul Goercke, an electronics expert who had also worked on the Nazi missile programme, and Hans Kleinwachter, who had served on the Eastern Front. Altogether, there were soon about 200 German expatriates working in Egypt, some of whom were engaged in building a new jet fighter, but most on the rocket programme.

Although some of the research work was undertaken in laboratories in Western Europe, like the one in Loerrach often used by Kleinwachter, the home of the Egyptian programme was Factory 333, an enormous white-washed building situated in the vast deserts around the city of Heliopolis. The site had originally been designed and used as a hospital, making the most of the dry climate and sulphur springs to treat rheumatism, a common condition among Western expatriates. But by the time the German scientists got to work in the summer of 1960, it was being ▷

**Above** Israeli General Moshe Dayan (on the right) shakes hands with General Mordechai Marcleff. Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion (in the centre) gave his full consent to Operation Damocles just days after the 1962 Egyptian test launches.

**Left** Head of Mossad's foreign intelligence, Isser Harel, in 1965. Along with other leading figures in Tel Aviv, he found the news of Nasser's missiles alarming, and was prepared to go to any lengths to ensure Israel's security.

used to manufacture simple training planes for the air force. Surrounded by machine-gun nests and encircled with barbed wire, this was where most of the top people involved in the missiles project were based.

The programme was kept secret from the outside world until the early afternoon of Saturday 21 July 1962. On that day, a national holiday in Egypt to commemorate the 1952 military coup, a spokesman for state-run radio announced that long-range rockets had been successfully test-fired at a remote desert site, accurately hitting targets more than 375 miles away. As a result, he continued, the country had now formally entered 'the missile age'. Almost at once, a closely choreographed sequence of events got under way as Egyptian cities erupted into displays of both planned and spontaneous public enthusiasm, with mass youth rallies,

gymnastic displays, water shows, boat races, fireworks, and fly pasts.

As they studied photographs of the rocket launches and the missiles paraded through the streets of Cairo, American experts made a basic assessment of their range. The smaller of the two missiles, they speculated, could have a 'maximum' range of around 220 miles, while the second prototype was 'probably' able to travel significantly further, although not nearly as far as the 375-mile range the Egyptians claimed.

## The Israeli perception

In the eyes of some leading figures in Tel Aviv – notably foreign minister Golda Meir, head of Mossad's foreign intelligence Isser Harel, and General Moshe Dayan – the dramatic revelation of Nasser's missiles was deeply alarming. After years of enjoying clear military superiority, Israel was suddenly overwhelmed by some fearsome-looking long-range missiles.

It is easy to understand Israeli concerns. The distance between Cairo and Tel Aviv is a mere 250 miles, putting Israeli civilians within range. Even if the Americans had overstated the missiles' capability, it only seemed a matter of time before the German experts succeeded in improving their range.

Equally alarming to some Israeli chiefs was the sheer enmity and ill-feeling between the Egyptian leader and the Jewish state. At a press conference, a journalist had pressed President Nasser about the missiles, asking him what they would be used for. The Egyptian leader replied that the military significance lay 'in the range they reach', adding that his own missiles could strike 'just south of Beirut'. This phrase was in itself a clear allusion to Israel, but not nearly as unmistakable as the references he made the following day in front of the Cairo masses. 'I want the world to know', he announced, 'that we will not allow Palestine to remain in the hands of Israel. As the world has seen, we are getting ready.'

**Above** In 1963 the new Israeli Prime Minister Levi Eshkol's impassioned speech imploring Germany to curb the scientists' work on the missile project succeeded in swaying West German public opinion. Officials subsequently sought alternative employment for its expatriate scientists.

> Even if the Americans had overstated the missiles' capability, it seemed only a matter of time before the German experts improved their range.

Some officials in Tel Aviv feared that, by acquiring the long-range missiles, the Egyptian leader would convince himself that his armies could win a new war. Buoyed by the development of the missiles, might he perhaps be tempted to launch a surprise attack on the Jewish state? The battlefield supremacy of the Israelis was not in doubt, but would not huge numbers of Israelis die if he fired the missiles on Tel Aviv, Haifa, and other cities?

## Operation Damocles

Isser Harel was prepared to act high-handedly to confront what he felt sure was a very grave threat to Israel's security. After all, these rockets were built by former Nazis. His fears were confirmed by the revelations of a defector, Otto Joklik, who claimed to have worked on the Egyptian rocket programme and to have first-hand knowledge of Nasser's bid to fill the missile warheads with radioactive material.

The Mossad chief's response was Operation Damocles, which was put into action just days after the July 1962 rocket launches, with the full approval of Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion. For Harel, 'there could be no compromise', as one of his associates wrote, 'with what he considered evil'.

A few days later, Hassan Kamil, the director of two front organisations that procured vital hardware for Nasser's rockets, hired a private jet to take him from Schleswig-Holstein to Düsseldorf. But at the very last moment he changed his plans. This was a fateful decision. Barely an hour after take-off, the plane plummeted to earth and exploded on ▷

impact, killing his wife and the pilot instantly. Investigators subsequently failed to find any explanation for the crash, and it was eventually attributed to mechanical failure.

The crash may have been coincidence, but what followed was not. On 11 September, a dark-skinned man walked into the office of another Egyptian procurement company in Munich, and met with the director, Dr Heinz Krug. The following day, Krug's wife phoned the police to say that he had gone missing and, after an intensive three-day manhunt, officers eventually discovered his Mercedes in the suburb of Solln. Krug's body was never found and, as far as the German police were concerned, he had simply vanished without trace

On 27 November, Wolfgang Pilz's young secretary, Hannelore Wende, was sorting mail at Factory 333 when she came across a bulky air-mail envelope addressed to her boss. When she opened the parcel, which contained an incendiary device, a huge explosion tore through the office, blinding her permanently in one eye and damaging her hearing. Pilz himself was badly shaken, if completely unharmed. More parcel bombs arrived in the weeks ahead, killing and maiming a number of Egyptian workers. Mossad agents were also active in Western Europe, coming within a whisker of killing Hans Kleinwachter, and accosting and threatening Paul Goercke's daughter in Freiburg.

## Israel changes tactics

In March 1963, two Mossad agents were caught red-handed by the Swiss police as they harassed Miss Goercke. As news of Operation Damocles leaked out, the campaign was brought to an immediate halt. The Israeli public, which had known nothing of it, was softened up with a media campaign about Nasser's rocket programme and its 'Nazi' link. The revelations also gave Harel's critics the upper hand as they fought to win Ben-Gurion's approval. Deputy Defence Minister Shimon Peres argued that using force and violence – in effect, terrorism – against the scientists would risk poisoning relations with West Germany, a huge export market and a potentially crucial supplier of arms. It was far better, Peres continued, to use gentle political pressure.

Ben-Gurion concurred, and over the next few months Israeli representatives stepped up pressure on West Germany, lobbying the Bonn government to restrain the work of its expatriates. Secret meetings were held between German finance minister Franz Josef Strauss and Shimon Peres, while lawyers argued the scientists' work violated the West German constitution, which forbade activities that 'disturb the peaceful relations between nations'. The key moment, however, was in August 1963, when the new Israeli prime minister, Levi Eshkol, succeeded in turning West German public opinion by making an impassioned and highly emotive plea on television to curb the scientists' work because of the dire threat he claimed they posed Israel. West German officials now worked hard to find alternative employment for the expatriate scientists, who, one by one, were lured back to Europe by higher salaries. By 1965, Nasser's rocket programme was effectively over.

> More parcel bombs arrived in the weeks after, killing and maiming a number of Egyptian workers.

## Operation Damocles 50 years on

Half a century on it is plain that the Egyptian missiles were really just paper tigers. Head of Israeli Military Intelligence Major-General Meir Amit argued that they were ultimately useless as battlefield weapons because they lacked the single most important component: a reliable control and guidance system. In other words, the Egyptians could fire the rockets into outer space, but had no way of bringing them down onto a target, or even getting close to one. Any such missile was more likely to land harmlessly in the Mediterranean or on Arab land than on Israel.

Amit knew that developing an effective guidance system was the most challenging aspect of a missile programme. During the Second World War, Nazi scientists carried out a staggering 60,000 modifications to the design of their V2 rocket, and many of these were made to iron out the flaws in its guidance system. By the time Operation Damocles began, the German scientists had already been working on the Egyptian programme for three long years. They had still not come close to solving this basic conundrum, partly because they lacked expertise, but also because they were short of the essential raw material. Smuggling the vital electronic components from Western Europe to evade licence controls was no easy business.

A few years later, the Six Day War between Israel and the Arab world bore unmistakable testimony to the failure of President Nasser's rocket programme. On the eve of the conflict, the Egyptians had around 20 missiles, but all of them were effectively useless, either because the rockets were not in working order or because they landed way off-target. If any of the missiles were ever launched, none ever hit Israel or its military forces. Nor did Israeli forces even bother targeting the factories where the missiles were developed and produced because, as a defence analyst wrote at the time, 'it was felt that the missiles in their present stage of development posed no threat'. Nor had Egypt even started a WMD programme, as Otto Joklik, who was just a fraud and imposter, had claimed.

There were other reasons why the fears of Harel, Meir, and their colleagues were exaggerated. For even if, by 1962, Nasser had succeeded in developing reliable and effective missiles, it is difficult to see what he would have stood to gain by ever deploying them against Israel. By the early 1960s, Israel not only had a supremely efficient and hard-hitting army, but was also actively pursuing a nuclear weapon. The Egyptians knew of this supposedly highly secretive programme, and its development was one central reason why Nasser had chosen to develop the rockets.

After the July 1962 missile launches, Field Marshal Abdul Amer proclaimed before the Cairo masses, '[Israel has] set up a large nuclear reactor in a mysterious manner that shows it intends to use the reactor for non-peaceful purposes.' By this time, the Egyptians had not even contemplated any WMD programme of their own, and provoking Israeli retaliation would have been a suicidal act.

By using violence against the scientists, in other words, Mossad had imperilled Israel's reputation. It was unnecessary, partly because political pressure was more effective, and partly because the Egyptian 'threat' was not grave enough to warrant such drastic measures.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Roger Howard** is the author of *Operation Damocles: Israel versus Hitler's scientists.*

# Experience freedom!

The Liberation Museum is set in the beautiful landscape near Nijmegen, Arnhem and the German border, a unique location: Operation Market Garden, the largest airborne operation in history took place here in September 1944 and Operation Veritable, the Rhineland Offensive, the final road to freedom in Europe, started from here in February 1945.

The museum brings the historical events of the liberation by the American, British, Canadian and Polish troops back to life. In the museum, you live through the period preceding the war, experience the occupation, celebrate the liberation and witness the rebuilding of the Netherlands and Europe after the war. Aromas, interactive presentations, diorama's, models, original films and sound fragments captivatingly depict the liberation. The museum shows both young and old the current value and importance of democracy, freedom and human rights.

## HIGHLIGHTS

- Freedom on Wings: 750 model airplanes of WW2
- Model of Operation Market Garden
- Air-raid shelter and Liberation Street
- Diorama of the Waal crossing
- Operation Veritable: the battle for the lower Rhine
- The Honorary Dome with Roll of Honour
- Temporary exhibition Febr-May 2013: 'All the children, they are gone' about the deportation of Dutch Jewish children to Poland in 1943.
- Temporary exhibition May-Nov 2013: 'Canadian War Brides, a one way passage to love' about the Dutch war brides in Canada.

## ACTIVITIES AND PROGRAMMES

- Guided tours and temporary exhibitions
- Educational programmes for children
- Battlefield tours and excursions (by bus or bicycle)
- Group packages
- Yearly events: commemorations and liberation festival
- Visit to the Canadian War Cemetery in Groesbeek and/or the Reichswald Cemetery in Cleves, Germany

For more information and special rates for touroperators please see our website www.liberationmuseum.com.

The National Liberation Museum 1944-1945
Wylerbaan 4, 6561 KR Groesbeek, The Netherlands
Tel + 31 24 397 4404
Fax + 31 24 397 6694
www.liberationmuseum.com
info@bevrijdingsmuseum.nl
Facebook National Bevrijdingsmuseum 1944-1945
Twitter @liberationNL

We would be proud to take you
into the history of

**two** exciting tours
led by **PETER KNOX OBE.**

- 1915 Gallipoli Campaign

- The Forgotten part of the Great
Crimean War
(The Siege of Kars, 1855)

PETEN TRAVELS

Halaskargazi Cad. No:183 Helal Apt.
D.7 34381 Şişli - İstanbul / Türkiye
T. +90 212 248 96 96 F. +90 212 246 19 36
E. petenturizm@petentour.com W. www.petentour.com

SOUTHAMPTON MARITIME FESTIVAL

Ocean Cruise Terminal
5th - 6th May 2013

Come and visit Southampton's Ocean Cruise Terminal for a two day festival celebrating Southampton's maritime heritage!

Join in the fun with our 1940s dress-up theme, visit the historic vessels or see the Lancaster Bomber fly-over.

There is lots for all the family. with stalls, displays, live music, an ice rink, face painting, and more! Whether you have an interest in history or just want a fantastic day out, the Southampton Maritime Festival will be an event to remember!

Admission:
Adults: £5 in advance, £6 on gate
Under 18s: Free
Group booking (10 people): £45

Tickets available from
Oceans Cafe, Southampton,
or on the festival website.

Website:
www.southamptonmaritimefestival.com
Facebook:
SouthamptonMaritimeFestival
Twitter:
@SotonSeaFest

Make Sure You Have
The Right Cover

Insurance for Military Vehicles

ADRIAN FLUX

0800 081 8989
adrianflux.co.uk

- FREE Legal Cover
- Limited Mileage
- Club Discounts
- Q-plates
- Agreed Value
- Modifications Cover
- Collections Cover
- Rally and Event Cover

MAY 2013

# OnManoeuvres

LISTINGS MUSEUM WAR ZONE

## DATES TO REMEMBER

THIS MAY

**May** Previously unseen photographs from Sean Smith's extensive documentation of the Iraq War become available for the first time this May at a new display at the IWM North. At the National Army Museum, they are kicking off the Museum at Night season with an after-dark tour, while the Western Front Association brings you the history of the Bedfordshire Regiment at their lecture in Harpenden.

David Flintham learns more about Operation Overlord at the Pegasus Bridge Memorial Museum in France for our museum review.

Also in France this month, Keith Robinson visits the site of the First Battle of the Marne.

Listings 62

Museum 64

War Zone 66

# DATES TO REMEMBER

## FESTIVAL

### Mari-time of your life!

This two-day heritage event will host a number of activities – including displays, attractions, and stalls – to keep the whole family entertained.

Join in the fun with the 1940s dressing-up theme, while you watch the steam tug *Challenge* return to Southampton, fresh from a recent refit that was funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund. With Prince Michael of Kent on board, *Challenge* will be given a grand escort by a flotilla of Dunkirk Little Ships.

As you explore the docks, you will come across numerous demonstrations from various organisations. You can visit Second World War re-enactors, admire the vintage Rolls-Royce cars, and learn more about the Southampton Trams, getting a glimpse of a bygone age.

**Southampton Maritime Festival**

jan.gillespie@hwtma.org.uk
www.southamptonmaritimefestival.com

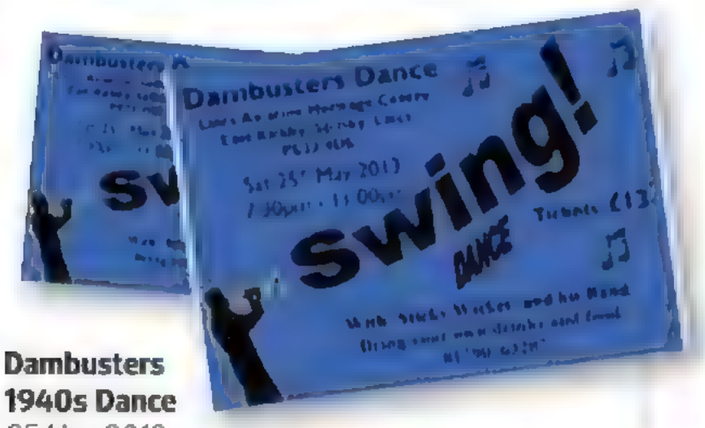
**FROM £5**

## EVENT

**Bomber's boogie**

The Lincoln Aviation Heritage Centre's annual 1940s dance is held under the wings of an Avro Lancaster NX611, and includes music of the period provided by Sticky Wicket and His Swing Band.

Have your picture taken in front of the Lancaster by a professional A&K Markham Photographer. The photos are printed and mounted on the night, and cost £10.00 (£2.50 of which goes to the Lancaster).




**Dambusters 1940s Dance**
*25 May 2013*

Lincolnshire Aviation Heritage Centre
East Kirkby Airfield
Lincolnshire PE23 4DE

01790 763207
www.lincsaviation.co.uk

**£13 ENTRY**

## LECTURE

**£3.50 DONATION**

## TOUR

**Finding Fighter Command**

This tour examines RAF Duxford's role as a typical Battle of Britain fighter station in 1940. The tour will look at the command and control systems used to win the battle in the air, including the 1940 Operations Room.

It will compare and contrast the aircraft flown during the battle – the Supermarine Spitfire, the Hawker Hurricane, and the Messerschmitt Bf 109 – and give visitors an insight into the lives of the fighter 'aces' who flew from RAF Duxford, recounting some of their more infamous escapades.

01223 835 000
www.iwm.org.uk

**£20.70 ENTRY**

## FAMILY EVENT

### *Belfast*'s voyages

From bananas in Borneo to a 21-gun-salute in San Francisco harbour, explore the many countries and cultures that HMS *Belfast* encountered as she sailed 500,000 nautical miles across the globe in her 30-year career.

Hear stories from across the world, and handle some of the objects that helped the ship and her sailors on their often treacherous journeys.

**Points on a Compass**
11 12 Mar 2013
HMS *Belfast*
The Queen's Walk
London SE1 2JH

£14.50 ENTRY

020 7940 6300
*www.iwm.org.uk*

## TOUR

### Culture after dark

Celebrating May's Museums at Night season, the National Army Museum will be opening its doors after hours. Families can tour the museum after dark, and embark on a quest to help a 'lost' exhibit find its rightful home. Watch out for mysterious characters who will help or hinder you on your adventures!

**Museums at Night**
*18 May 2013*
National Army Museum
Royal Hospital Road
London, SW3 4HT

£5 ENTRY

020 7881 6600
*www.nam.ac.uk*

## CELEBRITY LECTURE

### Mission impossible

Six hours before dawn on D-Day, 6 June 1944, 9 PARA dropped into the darkness behind the German defences. Their mission was to destroy the heavily fortified German gun emplacement at Merville.

In this talk, Colonel Stuart Tootal will draw on first-hand accounts of surviving veterans from both sides, detailed research, and his own combat experience. He will tell the story of a desperate band of brothers fighting their way to victory in the face of daunting odds.

**The Manner of Men: 9 PARA's Heroic D-Day Mission**
[illegible]

£10 ENTRY

020 7881 6600
*www.nam.ac.uk*

## EXHIBITION

Marking ten years since the start of the 2003 Iraq War, a new photographic display by award-winning British war photographer Sean Smith has been unveiled at IWM North in Manchester.

Smith has documented the war in Iraq for the *Guardian* since 2003. The display will reveal previously unpublished photographs, available to the public for the first time, alongside Smith's better-known images from the *Guardian*'s coverage.

The powerful displays focus on how war has shaped the lives of everyone in Iraq, with the sometimes touching, sometimes tragic photographs revealing a collision of two worlds, and telling the story of the complex relationship between military and civilian communities forced to co-exist.

FREE ENTRY

[illegible]

## EVENT

### Middy's war

Like all railways during the Second World War, Mid-Suffolk Light Railway (or 'Middy', as it was known locally) was very busy – especially after the two bomber bases at Horham and Mendlesham were completed, and the USAAF moved in with their B-17 Flying Fortresses. The little railway carried men and equipment along the line, as well as various munitions.

This event looks back at life on a rural railway during WWII. You will be able to relax in the refreshment room, and enjoy a selection of local ales in the bar coach while listening to some 1940s music and watching dancers.

**Middy in the War Years**
*5-6 May 2013*
Mid-Suffolk Light Railway
Brockford Station
Suffolk, IP14 5PW

FREE ENTRY

*www.middyatwar.co.uk*

# The Pegasus Bridge Memorial Museum

**David Flintham visits a large military museum in Normandy, and is impressed by the quality of its displays.**

The Operation Overlord beaches stretch for some 60 miles along the Normandy coastline. Today, this part of France is dotted with museums of varying sizes and quality, ranging from the large and purpose-built (such as the American Airborne Museum at Sainte-Mère-Eglise) to the tiny one- or two-room collections in cafés and bars. Many are excellent, including the small Dead Man's Corner Museum at Saint-Côme-du-Mont. But, while size is not always an indication of quality, one of the largest and best is the Pegasus Bridge Memorial Museum at Ranville, near Caen.

The Pegasus Bridge Memorial Museum was opened on 4 June 2000 by the Prince of Wales, Colonel-in-Chief of the Parachute Regiment. Dedicated to the men of 6th Airborne Division, the museum tells the story of the first action of D-Day – Operation Deadstick – the capture by a *coup de main* of the bridges over the Caen canal and Orne river. This action would prevent their use in any German counter-attack against the eastern flank of the landings at Sword Beach. So it was a critical undertaking.

Major John Howard led a force of 181 men from the Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry (plus sappers from the Royal Engineers and men from the Glider Pilot Regiment) in six Airspeed Horsa gliders. Landing at 00:16 on 6 June 1944, the attack was virtually a complete surprise to the Germans (one of the gliders, Chalk 91, landed just 47 yards from Bénouville Bridge over the Caen canal). The objectives were captured within 10 minutes of landing.

They were reinforced half an hour later by 7th Battalion the Parachute Regiment. Later they were joined by the beach landing forces, with the arrival of Lord Lovat's Commandos. One member of 7th Battalion was a young actor by the name of Richard Todd, who went on to play Major Howard in the film *The Longest Day* (as well as Guy Gibson in *The Dam Busters* – see p. 40).

The action saw the first Allied deaths of D-Day – Lieutenant Den Brotheridge and Lance-Corporal Fred Greenhalgh – and the first house to be liberated, now the Café Gondrée, close to Pegasus Bridge. The *coup de main* as a tactic was more closely associated with Germany's 1940 attacks on Fort Eben Emael and the Corinth Canal in 1941 than anything the British had mounted before. A number of authors have suggested that Operation Market Garden might have been more successful had the British repeated this tactic at Arnhem Bridge three and a half months later.

## Saving the Pegasus Bridge

The original museum – the Airborne Forces Museum – opened in 1974, but was closed in 1997. In 1993, as part of the canal-widening, the original Pegasus Bridge (renamed from Bénouville Bridge on 26 June 1944) was removed and replaced by the current bridge. The original was left on wasteground close by. Shortly after the closure of the first museum, the D-Day Commemoration Committee launched a campaign to raise funds and find a site for a new museum.

PICTURED ON BOTH PAGES:

1. *Monument signal*, the landing site of Glider Chalk 91, and the Major Howard Memorial
2. Café Gondrée, the first house to be liberated on D-Day
3. Centaur Close Support Tank
4. Replica Horsa Glider and Alex at the Pegasus Bridge Memorial Museum
5. Original Pegasus Bridge and 25-pdr gun at the museum
6. The new Pegasus Bridge, as seen from the Café Gondrée

In 1999, the original Pegasus Bridge was bought by the museum committee from the French authorities for the symbolic price of one franc, and it now forms the focal-point for the new museum.

Located between the canal and river bridges, the museum has been designed to resemble a glider from the front. The spacious entrance houses both the museum's shop and ticket desk. Generally speaking, the shops and range of items sold in the many Overlord museums is better than in the military museums in the UK; the one here is no exception.

On entry into the main hall, virtually the first thing encountered is an example of 'Rupert', a paradummy dropped over Normandy in the deception mission Operation Titanic. There are hundreds of other exhibits on display, ranging from an airborne jeep to uniforms, equipment, photographs, and models. Everything is well laid-out, and the accompanying explanation panels are appropriately and thoughtfully written. There is also a very good film, telling the story of the action and of the museum itself.

One display shows the Sten gun, Lee Enfield rifle, Bren gun, Gammon bomb, and other arms carried by the British troops who captured and held the bridges. Of particular note is a PIAT anti-tank weapon similar to the one used by Sergeant 'Wagger' Thornton to destroy a German armoured vehicle (accounts differ as to whether it was a tank or a half-track) in the early hours of D-Day. Stephen Ambrose has described this as 'the single most important shot of D-Day', since it halted the German counter-attack literally in its tracks. There is a display dedicated to Major John Howard which includes both his red beret and his helmet (the force of the glider landing had slammed Howard's helmet so far forward over his eyes that he initially thought he was blind).

The bagpipes on display at the Memorial Museum are one of the sets belonging to Piper William 'Bill' Millin. Millin was piper to Lord Lovat, commander of the 1st Special Service Brigade, and it was the sound of Millin playing 'Blue Bonnets over the Border' that first alerted Howard's men to the approach of Lovat at 13:30 on D-Day. The bagpipes he played on D-Day, along with his beret, 100-year-old kilt, and dirk are on display at the museum in Dawlish, south Devon, where he lived until his death in August 2010.

## The grounds

Within the three-acre grounds is a replica of the first Horsa glider to land at Bénouville Bridge. This was inaugurated on 5 June 2004 by the Prince of Wales and Jim Wallwork, the pilot of the first glider to land on D-Day in what has been described as the most outstanding feat of precision flying of the war. As this review was being written, I learned of the death of Staff Sergeant Jim Wallwork DFM on 24 January 2013. I therefore respectfully dedicate this article to his memory.

Also within the grounds is the original Pegasus Bridge (which visitors can walk across), still bearing the scars of the fighting. In a new museum building there is an original section of a Horsa glider. Other exhibits not directly associated with Operation Deadstick include a Bailey bridge, a 40mm Bofors anti-aircraft gun, 25-pdr guns, an American M3 half-track, and a quad .303 anti-aircraft mounting.

The area surrounding the museum is simply a must to explore. Across the road from the museum is the landing zone where three of the gliders came down on D-Day. This is commemorated by a bust of Major Howard and plinths marking the position where each Horsa landed.

Closer to the canal bridge is one of the *monuments signaux* erected by the Comité du Débarquement at significant D-Day sites. Close by the bridge is the 75mm anti-tank gun in its Tobruk housing. This was turned on its former owners by Corporal Wally Parr and his makeshift gun-crew (they fired on the water tower and the Château de Bénouville across the canal, only later discovering that the *château* was a maternity hospital whose director was a member of the Resistance).

Such is the quantity and quality of the D-Day sites, museums, and memorials that visitors are advised to select which ones to view. But the Pegasus Bridge Museum is an essential, not only for the excellence of the museum, but also because the battle-field itself is so accessible and, with the appropriate guide, easy to interpret.

**FURTHER INFORMATION**

The museum is open every day from February to November. The entrance fee is €6.50 for adults and €4.50 for children (8+) and students.

€6.50 ENTRY

+33 (0)2 31.78.19.44
*www.memorial-pegasus.org*

# The Miracle of the Marne

It was the WWI battle that halted the German advance on Paris and saved France. But today, the remains are few. **Keith Robinson** reports.

**Above** French troops driving back the invaders north of the Marne, near May-en-Multien, September 1914.

About 25 miles east-north-east of Paris, Meaux sits on the River Marne amid the rolling landscape of the Île de Paris. A well-watered, rich agricultural landscape makes Meaux famous as the home of Brie cheese. A broken line of higher ground stretches across the horizon, indicating the plateau through which the River Ourcq cuts its southward journey to the Marne. Nearly a century ago this quiet landscape was the site of a fierce, bloody conflict.

The First Battle of the Marne, 5-12 September 1914, marked the end of Germany's Schlieffen Plan, and of the rapid advance of German forces towards Paris. It also signified the end of traditional mobile warfare, and the rise of modern industrial warfare – stasis and three years of murderous trench warfare.

Schlieffen, Chief of the Great German General Staff between 1891 and 1905, was convinced that war must come again to Europe, and that Germany would be fighting on two fronts, against both France and Russia. He therefore aimed to win a quick war against France, and then transport his troops to the Eastern Front. He planned an immensely strong right flank sweeping through Flanders and Picardy, outflanking the heavily defended Franco-German border and strongpoints like Verdun. The Germans would swing around to Paris, take the French capital, and then strike the centre and right of the French Army from the rear.

## Von Moltke's plan

This plan was adopted by Schlieffen's successor as Chief of Staff, Helmuth von Moltke. A less audacious leader than Schlieffen, von Moltke modified the plan, and perhaps fatally weakened it. Fearing that the French might invade Germany along his left flank in the Alsace-Lorraine region – a possibility which Schlieffen had been prepared to accept if it meant overall success – von Moltke placed eight of his nine new divisions there, rather than using them to overwhelm the French left wing.

If the German strategic plan had been weakened, its execution would also be compromised. Underestimating the resistance of the Belgians, the efficiency of the British Expeditionary Force, and the stubbornness of the French, the German First Army under General Alexander von Kluck and the Second Army under General Karl von Bülow advanced – but not nearly as quickly as hoped.

Furthermore, at the urging of the French, on 17 August the Russians invaded East Prussia. Although the Russians were to be defeated at Tannenberg, this further unsettled von Moltke, who withdrew two army corps and a cavalry division from the German right wing to send to the Eastern Front. These troops arrived too late in the east, but sufficiently weakened the German right wing on the Western Front to have a decisive effect on the war.

Kluck, now believing he did not have the strength to swing west around Paris and take the capital, decided to move his troops across the north-east of the city. From here, he hoped to attack the French centre and right in the rear. By 24 August, he was within 22 kilometres of Paris.

## The defence of Paris

The following day, General Joseph Galliéni was appointed Military Governor of Paris, having earlier turned down the chance to become France's military supremo. By this time, the newly formed French Sixth Army, originally assembled near Montdidier under General Michel Maunoury, had been

pushed back to the environs of Paris by the German advance. It now came under Galliéni's control.

On 2 September, the French Government, having told the newly appointed Galliéni to 'defend Paris to the utmost', showed every faith in the military by removing itself to Bordeaux. The next day, the BEF retreated through Meaux, blew up the bridges across the Marne, and regrouped near Coulommiers. Disheartened by the French Government's move to Bordeaux, General John French considered withdrawing further. He was prevented from doing this by the Secretary of State for War, Lord Kitchener, who, on a flying visit from London, made the commander of the BEF very aware of the need to continue supporting French forces.

Kluck, however, believing the BEF and the French to be still retreating, pushed on with his attacking line across the north-east of Paris, despite orders from von Moltke on 4 September to stand fast and keep in contact with von Bülow's forces. His right flank was now vulnerable to an attack from the forces in Paris.

Galliéni was made aware of Kluck's movements by superior Allied intelligence. On the morning of the 3 September, British air reconnaissance reported that Kluck was no longer moving towards Paris, but had wheeled south-east towards Compiègne. In his memoir of the Battle of the Ourcq, Galliéni's Chief of Staff, General Clergerie, noted the German's 'intemperate' use of the wireless telegraph. He also wrote of how General von der Marwitz, cavalry commander of the German First Army, did not bother to encrypt his dispatches. Such telegraph signals were easily picked up by the French listening posts based in the Eiffel Tower, enabling the Allies to counter German moves.

Having recognised the opportunity that Kluck's movement offered the Allies, Galliéni quickly sped to the headquarters of General Joseph Joffre, Commander-in-Chief of the French Army. Joffre was reluctant at first to authorise an attack because of the men's fatigue. He was eventually persuaded, but recognised the necessity of a co-ordinated attack along the whole front. It was now Joffre's turn to persuade General French to commit the BEF. French, mindful of Kitchener's earlier visit, gave his support.

## The Battle of the Ourcq

The Battle of the Ourcq began at lunchtime on 5 September, when the advance forces of Maunoury's Sixth Army came into contact with Kluck's army reserve, the 4th Corps of von Gronau. The Moroccan Brigade and the 55th and 56th Infantry Divisions struck at Villeroy – where the poet Charles Péguy was killed – Iverny, and Monthyon.

The fighting was particularly bloody, often hand-to-hand, with attack and counter-attack as the French sought to liberate the villages to the north of Meaux and west of the Ourcq. The Moroccans suffered particularly heavy losses in these early struggles, as they charged into hails of machine-gun fire.

An unnamed officer of Zouaves describes the early days of the conflict: 'For four days previous to 7 September, we were engaged in clearing out the German bosches from all the villages on the left bank of the Ourcq, which they had occupied in order to protect the flank of their right wing.

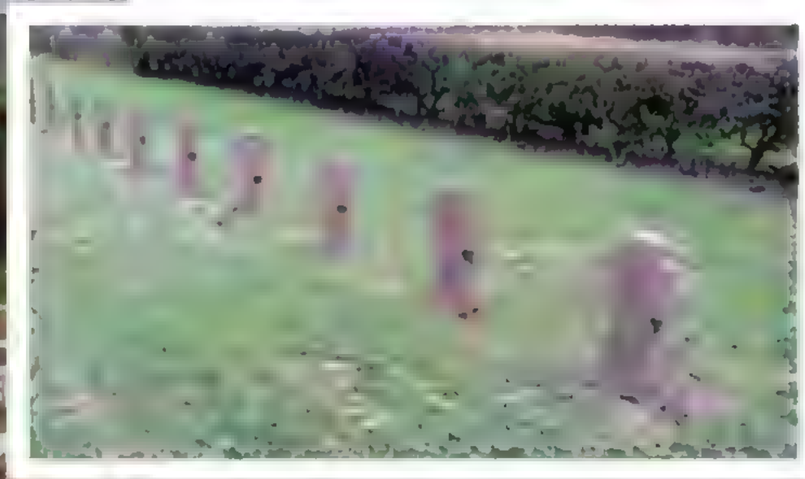
'However, we were equal to the preliminary task, and… my Zouaves… were in splendid form. They did good things, those Zouaves of mine, but it wasn't pleasant work. We fought from village to village, very close fighting, so that sometimes we could look into our enemy's eyes. The Moroccans were with us. The native troops are unlike my boys, who are Frenchmen, and they were like demons with their bayonet work.'

Another eye-witness described the aftermath of a day's fighting: 'When night closed in on the scene, the whole landscape was lit with burning villages, farms, and haystacks. By the light of these burning structures, the Germans built enormous pyres of wood and straw, saturated them with paraffin, and cremated their dead on the battlefield.'

Kluck, now recognising the seriousness of his position, turned the First Army north and west to face Maunoury's forces, pulling back across the Marne and west of the Ourcq. Maunoury was now faced with superior German numbers.

## The French people's war

Galliéni had foreseen the need for reinforcements, and had already requisitioned Parisian public transport. Troops arriving in Paris were met at railway stations and transported to the front. Most famously, on 7 September, Parisian taxis, with meters running, ferried some 6,000 men along the N2 to augment Maunoury's forces. This event became an important part of the mythology of the war, catching the public's imagination, and emphasising



**Left and below** An intricately designed mosaic displaying the names of the French fallen. In contrast, the cemetery for German soldiers who fell during the battle is sombre and impersonal.

**Above** A commemorative plaque on the cemetery wall through which the Zouaves knocked loop-holes to provide cover for their stand.

the sense that this was the French people's war.

Kluck's manoeuvre, however, created a major problem for the German forces. By moving north and west, he created a gap of around 48 kilometres between his own First Army and von Bülow's Second Army. There were no reserves to fill the gap. This was spotted by the French and the BEF, who seized their chance to attack and marched into the gap.

Moltke, some 320 kilometres away in Luxembourg, was getting nervous reading the scattered and confused reports he was getting from the front. He sent one of his staff officers, Lieutenant-Colonel Richard Hentsch, to survey the fighting and attempt to improve communications between Kluck and von Bülow. He arrived at Second Army headquarters just as the French were starting to turn von Bülow's flank. The general decided he had no option but to retreat towards the north, despite the fact it would further expose the left flank of the German First Army.

Having determined that the French and British had crossed the Marne, Hentsch travelled to Kluck's headquarters and, with Moltke's authority, ordered the German First Army to retreat. The exhausted Allied forces were unable to follow up their victory. The Germans retired in relatively good order across the Aisne and began to heavily fortify the ridge of the Chemin des Dames overlooking the Aisne's north bank.

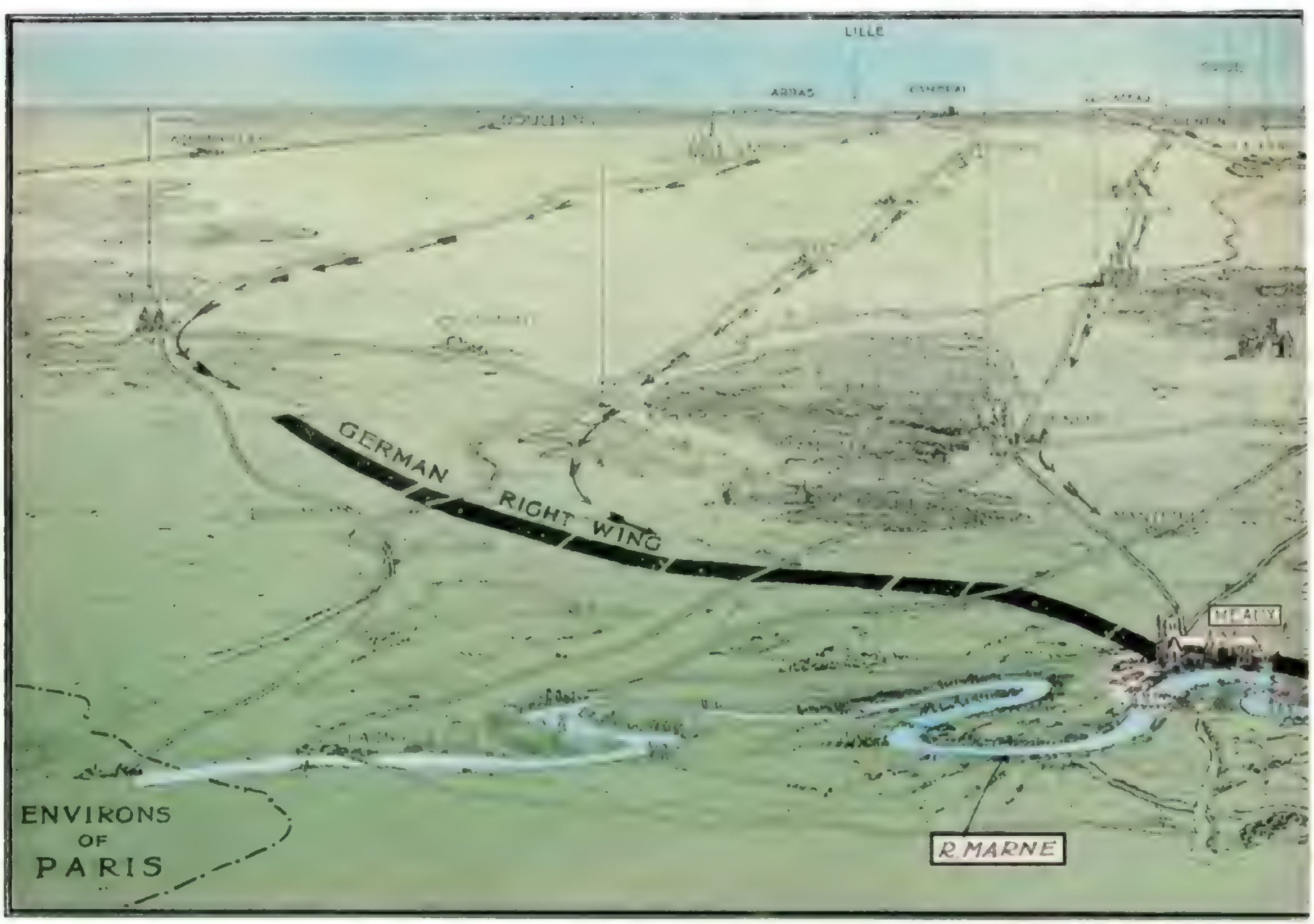
The Miracle of the Marne was complete. The war would descend into the bloody stalemate of trench warfare. Von Moltke was a broken man, and would be replaced as Chief of Staff by Erich von Falkenhayn on 14 September.

## The Marne today

Today the landscape is one of large, open fields. Land-use is maximised, and everything is well-groomed. Permanent bridges cross the Marne at Meaux, and the towns and villages in the surrounding countryside look as neat and tidy as the fields they sit among.

Any smoke comes from well-tended domestic fires, not from burning haystacks or farmsteads, nor from the impromptu cremations of dead soldiers. Buildings show little in the way of scars from past conflict.

The Church of Saint Bartélémy in Neufmontiers was used as a field hospital during the Battle of the Ourcq, treating the wounded from both sides. A photograph shows some of the medical



orderlies and soldiers wearing captured *Pickelhauben* (spiked helmets), standing in front of a mound of seized German equipment. The church itself did not escape the fighting unscathed, but has since been heavily restored.

The conflict is primarily remembered by a number of local memorials. The Chauconin-Neufmontiers memorial contains the remains of 133 French soldiers who fell during a counter-attack by the Germans on 5 September 1914. Numbered among the fallen was their lieutenant Charles Péguy.

A simple, classical design holds the names of the dead. A colourful mosaic surrounds the panel, and is surmounted by a 'bouquet of French flags'. The monument is topped with a cross, and a flagpole stands behind. It is set within a formal layout of paths and gravel beds looking out over the surrounding farmland.

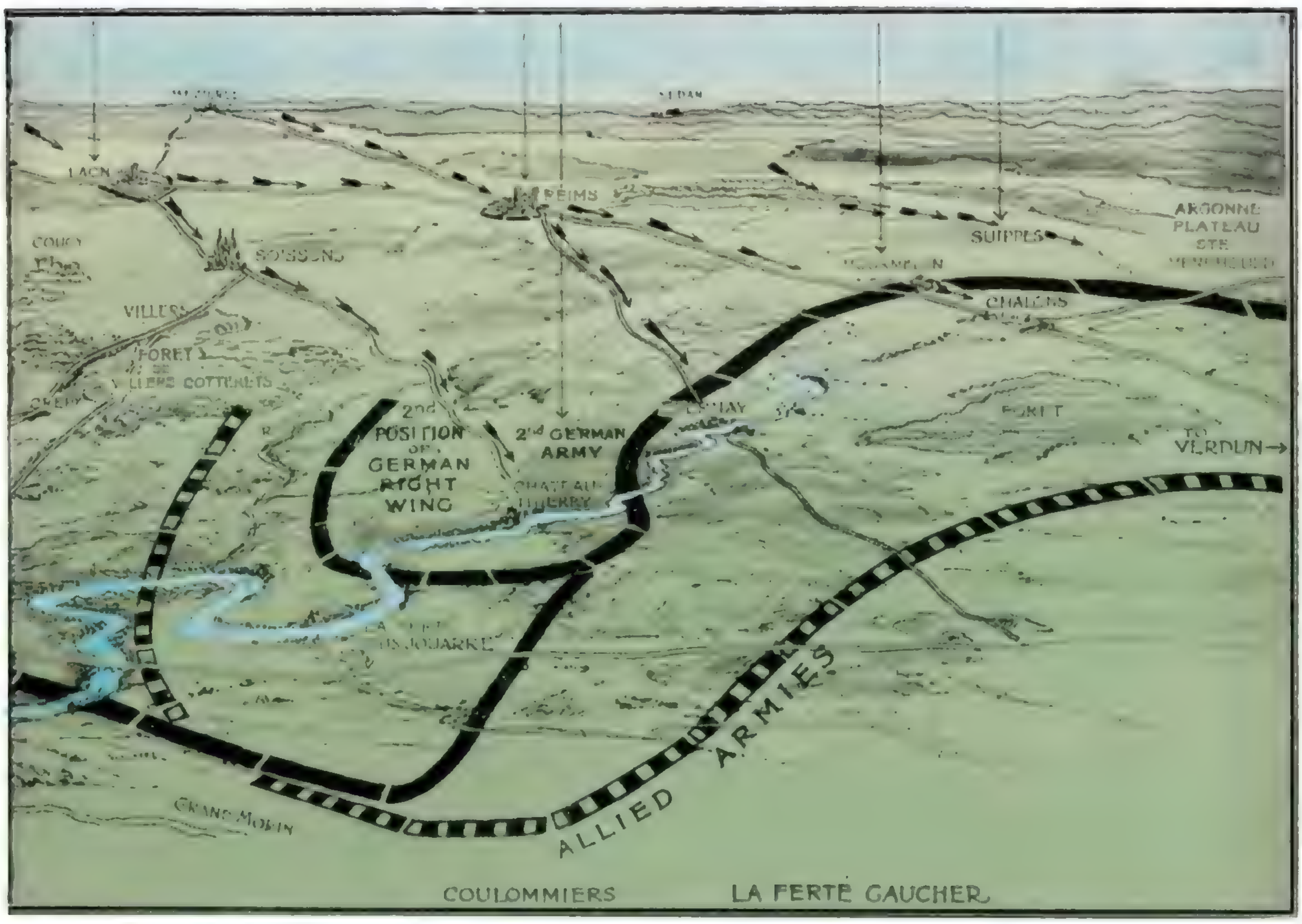
Compare this with the German military cemetery, only a few kilometres away to the north of Chambry. This is set in a shallow valley, and partly surrounded by tall trees. The cemetery holds around a thousand soldiers, many of them unknown and placed in a communal grave. Those named have paired headstones, with an inscription of both names; no date of death, no rank, no regiment.

One of the more physical remnants of the battle lies in the village of Chambry itself. In the civilian cemetery lies a fragment of wall revealing a couple of loopholes knocked through the wall by members of the Zouaves of the 45th African Division to provide defensive cover. Beneath the wall are two tombs of Zouaves killed in the conflict. Their marble tombs and the engraved plaque on the wall above them have been turned into a kind of shrine. When I was there, palms had been placed on the tombs, signifying martyrdom.

The landscape of the Battle of the Ourcq is more a landscape of memorials than of fragments of a bloody past: quiet, lonely monuments in wide open hectares of contemporary rural landscape.

**Above** Parisian taxi-cabs taking reinforcements to the Front on 7 September 1914.

**Below** A diagrammatic map of the German advance to the Marne.



Visit the battlefields of World War One and Two with

*Rifleman Tours*

Let Rifleman Tours lead you across the 'Flanders Fields' or to the infamous D-Day beaches of Normandy.

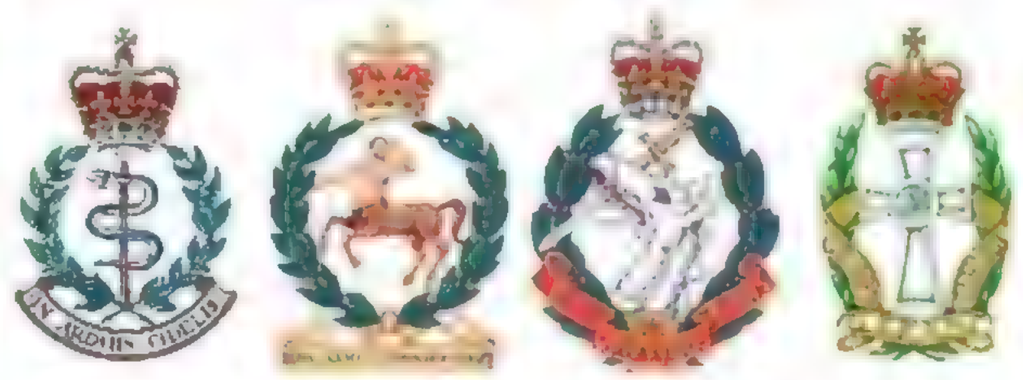
Bringing the battlefields to life, Rifleman Tours conveys the thoughts and perspectives of all who fought there.

Our exclusive tours cater for small groups of 12 to 18 people creating an informal relaxed and friendly atmosphere.

Our tours include:
Executive travel, 3 star accommodation
Museum entrance fees and tour day lunches
Flexible itinerary to accommodate special interests
For more details of our tours visit our website

**www.riflemantours.co.uk**

Tel: 01908 617264 or Email: info@riflemantours.co.uk



# THE ARMY MEDICAL SERVICES MUSEUM

The story of medicine and health care provision to the army from 1660 to the present.
Life sized dioramas, inter-active displays and trails & quizzes for children.

**Admission Free!**

Open Mon – Fri 0930 – 3.30

AMS Museum, Keogh Barracks,
Ash Vale GU12 5RQ.
**01252 868612.**
*www.ams-museum.org.uk*

# Reason why...

*The Crimean War Research Society*
www.crimeanwar.org

Registered Charity No.1119178

## Become a Friend of
## The Naseby Battlefield Project

- Help to promote recognition of the historic importance of the Naseby Battlefield
- Support plans to build a Visitor Centre at Naseby
- Visit the Battlefield Trail
- Enjoy guided walks and talks
- Experience re-enactment and living history events
- For full details visit our website: www.naseby.com

MAY 2013

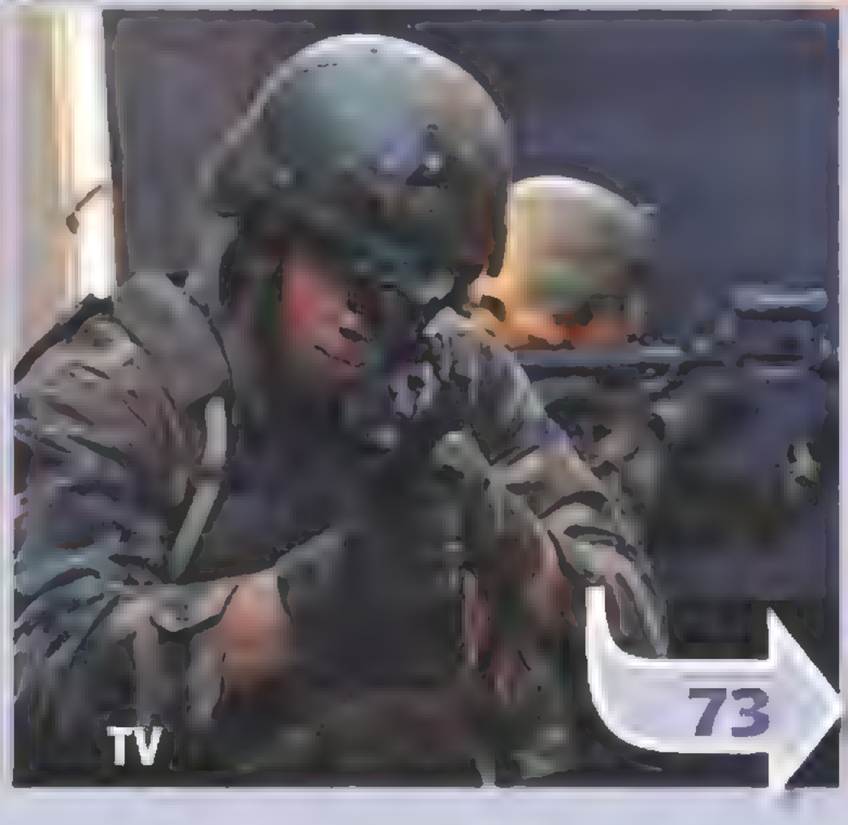
# MHMReviews

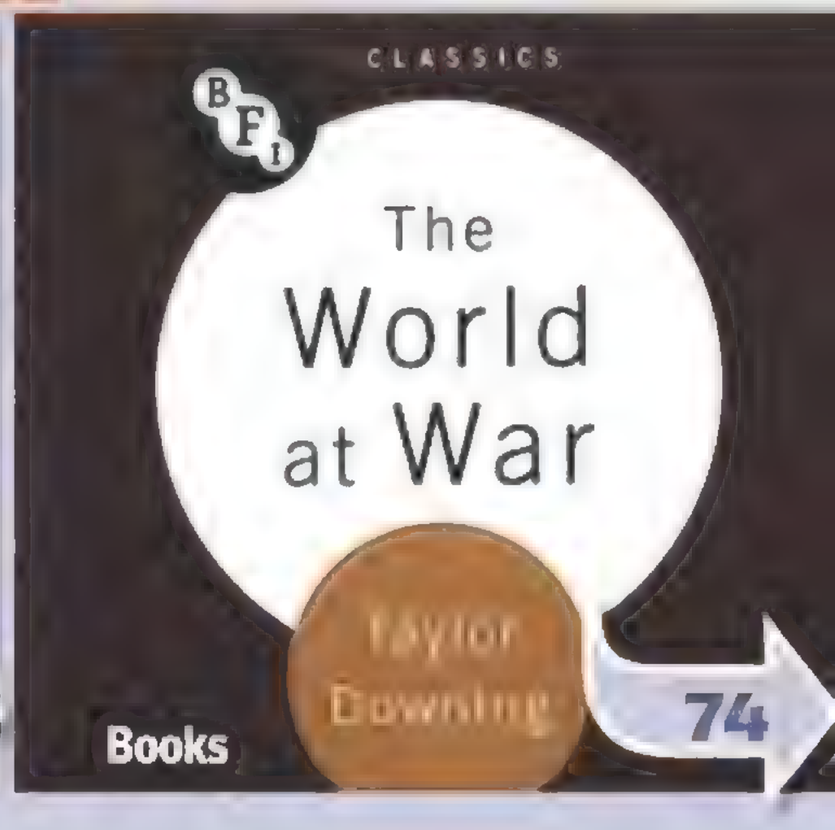
FILM | TV | BOOKS

**May** Neil Faulkner reviews Taylor Downing's new book on the making of one of the most renowned documentaries in British television history: *The World at War.* Also up for review are Saul David's *All the King's Men*, and Andy Merriman's history of ENSA, *Greasepaint and Cordite.*

The Military History channel is changing to H2. This new channel will offer a deeper perspective on history from all around the globe. Top of the bill this month is *Ultimate Soldier Challenge.*

The unlikely friendship between an Israeli pilot and a Palestinian refugee forms the basis of May's DVD review, *Zaytoun.*



# FILM

## *ZAYTOUN*

**ARTICIAL EYE**
8 APRIL 2013
£14

Covering familiar territory, director Eran Riklis' new film *Zaytoun* is the story of an unlikely friendship forged between Yoni, an Israeli pilot shot down on a mission over Lebanon, and Fahed, a 12-year-old Palestinian boy. The film is set in 1982 Beirut, the same year as the Sabra and Shatila massacre.

Having been captured by the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO), Yoni (Stephen Dorff) faces torture and death. The young orphan Fahed dreams of visiting his family's ancestral village in Israel and planting the olive tree cultivated by his father in their old farm. But travelling through war-torn Beirut is not an easy task and Fahed soon realises that he will need Yoni's help to cross the border. Wrestling with his hate of Israelis (his father was killed by Israeli bombs) and his desire to make the pilgrimage to his family's farm, Fahed agrees on a pact: he will help free Yoni from the clutches of the PLO if Yoni will take him back to Israel.

And so begins a rather predictable and unlikely journey as the two characters leave Beirut and rush to the border. Mutual mistrust, of course, eventually gives way to respect and friendship. Having dodged the dangers of child-killing snipers and Palestinian guerrillas, Yoni and Fahed form a father-son relationship in Israel, where all previous grievances and deep-seated hatred is soon washed away.

The film is best when it is concentrating on the adventure. But while its action is slickly shot and exciting, the sentimental scenes drag on. This is a well-meaning and endearing drama, not the sort of film which needs to attempt to make any hard-hitting political points. If anything, the film's message seems to be that individual unions such as Yoni and Fahed's can settle barbaric international political conflict. If they can see past their differences, surely everyone can?

Despite these pitfalls, the film is enjoyable enough. Dorff's occasionally wobbly Israeli accent doesn't detract from what is otherwise a good performance, and Abdallah El Akal shines as the untrusting, mentally wounded, yet feisty young Palestinian. Their on-screen chemistry is convincing and, at times, quite touching.

This is not the hard-hitting, overwhelming film that Riklis perhaps hoped it would be. But it is an entertaining and heart-warming tale with some excellently-built moments of suspense and some beautifully crafted action sequences.

# TV HIGHLIGHTS

## ON H2 CHANNEL

Sky 531 Virgin Media 236

**ULTIMATE SOLDIER CHALLENGE**
**Wednesdays 9pm, from 8 May**

They are the best-trained, most-skilled military groups in America. Smart, versatile, and agile, they can swiftly adapt to any challenge. These are the men and women of Special Operations.

American Special Ops units have always been the best of the best. The Army Rangers trace their origins back to the American Revolution, when George Washington formed an élite unit of men to run dangerous recon missions. WWII spawned the Navy Seals, when the US needed covert amphibious troops, and the Cold War launched the Green Berets.

*Ultimate Soldier Challenge* matches US Special Ops units against élite forces from around the world in a head-to-head competition of strength, smarts, and strategy. Each episode will feature two pairs of soldiers, who will compete against each other in five challenges. They gain points with each challenge, and a winner is crowned at the end of the show.

**A HISTORY OF BRITAIN**
**Fridays 9pm, from 10 May**

This epic series explores the grand themes of life through Britain's rich and colourful history. It presents the past in an accessible form, using everyday analogies that help viewers relate to the past. It looks at concepts like the cyclical nature of power, and examines all levels of society, revealing that – in essence – mankind never changes. *A History of Britain* is written and presented by the world-renowned historian Simon Schama. Series One tracks Britain from as early as 3000 BC, and continues up until the British wars of the 17th century.

**SERIAL KILLER EARTH**
**Mondays 9pm, from 6 May**

Natural disasters can be more powerful and destructive than all other forces on the planet. Throughout human history, hurricanes, earthquakes, tsunamis, and other devastating catastrophes have threatened to wipe out civilisations around the world. *Serial Killer Earth* brings together a leading team of experts to analyse video footage and eye-witness testimony. Their goal is to determine what caused today's natural disasters, and how they measure against the worst of all time.

# BOOKS

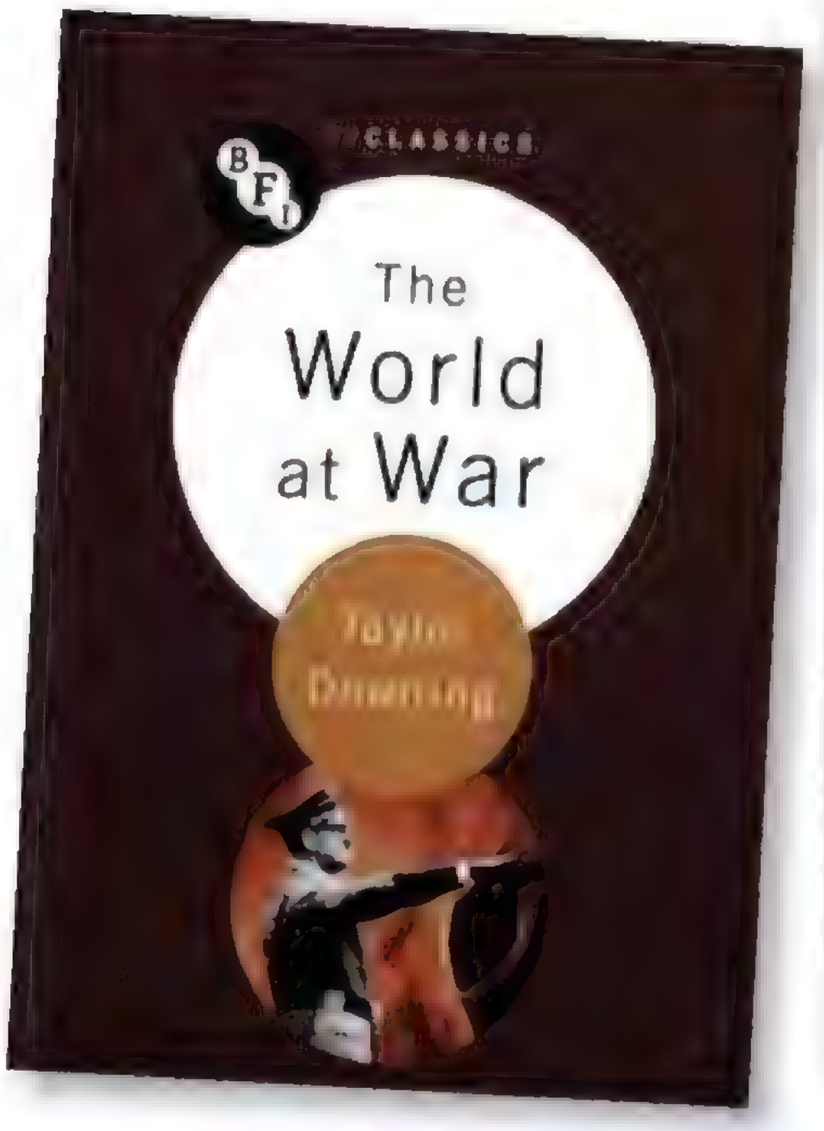
## *THE WORLD AT WAR*

**Taylor Downing**
BFI/Palgrave Macmillan, £14.99
ISBN 978-1844574834

The 26-part series *The World at War* remains the most renowned TV documentary in the history of British television. It is, says Taylor Downing in this splendid new account of the making of the series, 'unique in factual television', 'a pinnacle of film-making'.

'It was,' he continues, 'made in an era when programme-makers rather than accountants and marketing people ruled the roost in television companies.' Today, series are shorter, budgets are lower, and format is king, as resources are ploughed into reconstruction and CGI instead of research and good story-telling.

That is why, after all these years, *The World at War* is still compelling. Though a mammoth production – three years in the making, involving a team of 50 professionals, costing what was at the time the eye-watering sum of £900,000 – even this epic scale has been dwarfed by its prodigious success. Up to ten million watched when it was first broadcast on ITV between October 1973 and May 1974; since then it has never been off-air, and has proved a best-seller in both VHS and DVD formats.




Downing's book is a superb mix of narrative, analysis, and anecdote; for anyone who knows and admires the series, a fascinating insight into how it was done.

As so often with cultural milestones, it almost did not happen. Bureaucratic caution and inertia caused the BBC to miss the boat. ITV had an image problem that threatened its licensing, independence, and profits in the early 1970s. Thames Television was 'an ambitious young company keen to demonstrate that it could make quality programmes on a par with anything the BBC could produce'. And money had suddenly become available with a halving of the taxes paid by ITV franchise-holders to the government. So producer Jeremy Isaacs got the green light.

Isaacs assembled a talented team of producers, directors, script-writers, researchers, and other specialists. Considerable latitude was given to the people working on each programme. Downing focuses on a handful of episodes to show how different each one could be. Yet the series was bound together by overarching themes and formats, symbolised by Carl Davis's haunting music and Laurence Olivier's sombre narration. What was crucial was an alliance of 'the young ambitious television producer [Isaacs] and the experienced but sceptical museum director [Noble Frankland, Director of the Imperial War Museum].'

Frankland had drawn up an initial list of what had to be covered. Isaacs prepared a 'treatment'. The two men knocked the basic ideas backwards and forwards until there was broad agreement, and then, as the production teams got to work, they checked and edited the scripts. There was, therefore, a single vision: of the war as a global conflict (not one centred on Britain and the US); of the war as a multi-faceted human experience (not just a tale of generals and battles); of the war as a human tragedy, tearing apart the lives of tens of millions of ordinary people; of the war as equally about 'the bomber and the bombed, the Nazi and the Jew'.

The unified 'voice' represented by the Isaacs/Frankland partnership ensured

A mammoth production, *The World at War* was three years in the making, and cost what was then an eye-watering sum of £900,000.

that there was a single narrative thread, uncomplicated by historical debate, for which TV is traditionally a poor vehicle. As Downing points out, this is a lesson repeatedly confirmed by experience – from A J P Taylor to Schama and Starkey – yet often neglected by programme-makers obsessed with format.

The essence of the series is the judicious mix of archive film and eye-witness testimony. Heavy expenditure on research paid rich dividends. *The World at War* includes some of the most spellbinding moments ever seen on factual TV: the chillingly remote and sinister Albert Speer (contact with whom left the BBC interviewer feeling morally tainted for 'being nice to a shitbag'); the newly discovered home movies of Eva Braun showing the Nazi élite relaxing ('the archive film equivalent of discovering Tutankhamun's tomb'); the testimonies of Christabel Bielenberg, who felt that 'Hitler had turned me into a murderer', and of Traudl Junge, who was with Hitler in the bunker at the end; the 'Holocaust' programme, which showed archive film of the camps never before shown to a general audience, and featured interviews with senior SS officers as well as with their victims; and much more.

Read Downing's book and then watch the series again to experience, with deeper understanding, a masterpiece the like of which we may never see again.

*Neil Faulkner*

## All the King's Men: the British Redcoat in the era of sword and musket

**Saul David**
Penguin, £9.99
ISBN 978-0141027937

This engaging book covers the history of the British Army from the Restoration of 1660 to the Battle of Waterloo in 1815. This, of course, is the period when Great Britain rose to be a 'Great Power' as a result of the War of the Spanish Succession (1701-1714), and then went on to become an Imperial Power following the Seven Years' War (1756-1763). As David points out, much scholarship has been devoted to the performance of the Royal Navy during this period. *All the King's Men* seeks to redress the balance by showing how Britain's small professional army came of age, and established itself as one the finest in Europe.

David's work is based on a detailed analysis of the three great commanders of the time: Marlborough, Wolfe, and Wellington. In addition, he produces a plethora of detail about the life, training, equipment, feeding, and fighting ability of 'that article', as Wellington famously described the British Redcoat.

David's attention to detail, and his ability to unearth the minutiae of life in the army of the 18th century, is remarkable. Using the few contemporary diaries written by private soldiers, he paints a vivid picture of what it was actually like to be in combat with a Brown Bess musket, red coat, and tricorn hat, facing French regulars, savage claymore-wielding Highlanders, seditious Americans – and finally, Napoleon Bonaparte.

The first six chapters are devoted to Marlborough, his epic march to the Danube, followed by the resounding victory at Blenheim. No such English victory had occurred since Agincourt in 1415. Together with further triumphs at Ramillies and Oudenaarde, this firmly established Britain as one of the European Great Powers. Strangely, no mention is made of the contemporary fiasco in the Peninsula under Galway and Stanhope.

Wolfe's meteoric career, culminating in his death at the moment of his greatest triumph – the capture of Quebec in 1759 – is covered in depth. David does not shy away from the fact that Wolfe had a somewhat shaky grip on strategy and was decidedly bellicose in his treatment of recalcitrant Highlanders after Culloden. However, his inspirational leadership and obsession with training deservedly earned him his place in the pantheon of imperial heroes.

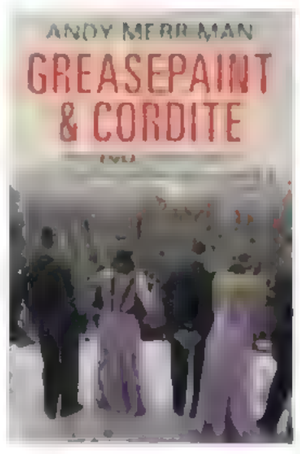
Unfortunately, Wolfe's legacy was to be all but destroyed in the subsequent American War of Independence (1776-1783), mainly due to the ineptitude of various British commanders, notably the brothers Howe. Predictably, but regrettably, David also castigates the valiant Cornet Banastre Tarleton, one of the outstanding fighting soldiers of this horrid war.

The concluding chapters provide a brilliant account of Arthur Wellesley's rise to fame from Etonian dilettante to conqueror of Napoleon. From an inauspicious start in Flanders to hard-earned success in India, Wellesley finally obtained an independent command that was due to sail to Venezuela. Fortunately it was redirected to Portugal, and thus began one of the outstanding campaigns in the annals of the British Army, climaxing with the victory at Waterloo. This book, complete with excellent maps and superb illustrations, comes highly recommended.

*Mark Corby*

## Greasepaint and Cordite: how ENSA entertained the troops during World War II

**Andy Merriman**
Aurum History, £20.00
ISBN 978-1845136185




It is impossible to quantify the contribution of stage entertainment to fortifying the fighting spirit of troops on the battlefields of WWII. In his delightful tale of how ENSA – the Entertainment National Services Association – worked, Andy Merriman says of one show put on in the Libyan Desert, 'There is enthusiastic cheering and applause from the audience. Probably more than the show deserves, but these troupers have travelled a long way, in uncomfortable conditions, at some risk to themselves, and for not much money.'

The whole project was the brainchild of Basil Dean, a former soldier and pioneer of entertainment during the First World War. Dean believed another war with Germany was inevitable. In 1938 he was already working on a plan for entertainment as soon as hostilities were declared. 'Both Dean and [actor Leslie] Henson were convinced that the theatre of entertainment could be transposed to the theatre of war, wherever that may be, and prove its worth in a national emergency,' says Merriman.

The ENSA line-up included big-name entertainers like Gracie Fields, whose morale-boosting performances were so effective Hitler actually declared her an enemy of the Third Reich. According to a German propaganda magazine, 'She earned for England the equivalent of a hundred new Spitfires. She is adjudged a war industry and should therefore be treated accordingly.'

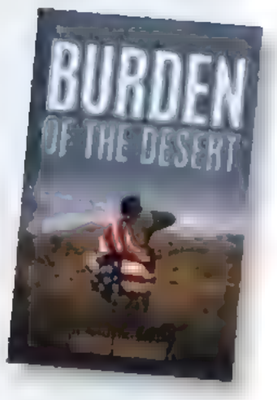
ENSA followed the advance of British troops after the tide of war began to turn in the Allies' favour. In 1944, Dean took over the chairmanship of the Second Front Committee, which was to oversee all aspects of ENSA's own mini-invasion of Normandy. 'Your job is to sing while the guns are blazing,' declared Winston Churchill. Dean responded by bringing to French territory stars like George and Beryl Formby, and Virginia Vernon. More than 140 artists were transported to the newly liberated areas by a huge infrastructure of lorries, coaches, and motorbikes. This was truly mass entertainment.

ENSA's work did not end with the Allied victory. Many tens of thousands of PoWs and those too badly injured to be immediately evacuated from the Far East and Europe needed distractions. At the close of hostilities, the Old Vic Theatre Company arranged a European tour. Among the players was Laurence Olivier, who performed in Belgium and in less-comfortable surroundings such as Hamburg, where they put on a performance of *Richard III*.

It was not until 2000 that ENSA's wartime contribution gained full recognition. The Royal British Legion decided to extend the Remembrance Day parade to include some of the surviving performers in the ceremony. By that time, Basil Dean – a controversial figure, but as determined a fighter as the men who delighted in his entertainment – was more than 20 years in his grave.

*Jules Stewart*

# ON THE HORIZON

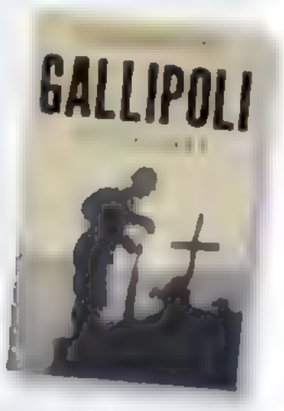



**Burden of the Desert**
**Justin Huggler**
CreateSpace Independent Publishing, £12.99
ISBN 978-1479352043
In his fast-paced, gripping debut novel, Justin Huggler – former correspondent in Iraq for the *Independent* – poses important questions about the Iraq War 10 years after it began.

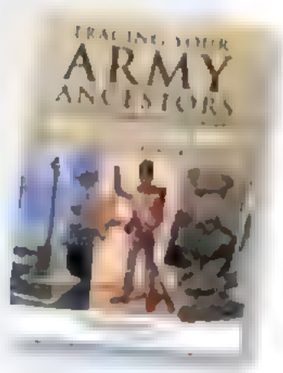
**Constantine the Emperor**
**David Potter**
Oxford University Press, £25
ISBN 978-0199755868
Based closely on contemporary evidence, David Potter has written a penetrating and original analysis of the evolution of Constantine's role as Emperor, and of his conception of that role.

**Axis Sally: the American voice of Nazi Germany**
**Richard Lucas**
Casemate, £11.99
ISBN 978-1612001395
The untold story of the unfulfilled Broadway showgirl who went on to become the notorious mouthpiece of the Third Reich to millions of GIs.

**Cracking the Luftwaffe Codes: the secrets of Bletchley Park**
**Gwen Watkins**
Frontline Books, £12.99
ISBN 978-1848326828
With a foreword from Asa Briggs, this is an intriguing account of life at the secretive institution of Bletchley Park, and how its often ecentric personnel helped Britain win the war.




**Gallipoli**
**Peter Hart**
Profile Books, £10.99
ISBN 978-1846681615
Drawing on unpublished personal accounts by individuals at all levels and from all sides – not only from Britain, Australia, and New Zealand, but unusually, also from Turkey – Hart combines his trademark keen eye for vivid personal stories with a strong narrative.




**Tracing Your Army Ancestors: a guide for family historians**
**Simon Fowler**
Pen & Sword, £12.99
ISBN 987-1781590867
A book to point budding genealogists in the right direction. Whether you are interested in the career of an individual officer, the medals of a particular soldier, or want to know more about a certain battle or campaign, Fowler explains what war records survive, where they can be found, and how they can help you in your research.

## Lead Shot of the English Civil War: a radical study

**D F Harding**
Foresight Books, £19.50
ISBN 978-0953085361

Locating the fall of shot is crucial to the understanding of a battle or siege. But identifying a concentration of shot in one particular area, for instance, is only part of the analysis. Is such a concentration evidence of a bloody firefight, or does it show an area targeted by one side? Perhaps it is evidence of the flight of beaten soldiers, anxious to rid themselves of any hindrance, or simply an indication of where a supply wagon lost part of its load.

So the ability to 'read' the marks on lead shot is fundamental: being able to distinguish between damage caused by loading, by compression and gas escape in the breech when firing, by impact, and by agriculture while in the ground.

It is the complete analysis of shot – where it fell and evidence of whether the shot was 'spent' or not – which is at the core of David Harding's new study.

The book is based on research into some 1,800 lead shot discovered at a site at Easton Maudit in Northamptonshire, which the author concludes was used for training during the English Civil War. This touches on a seldom-considered aspect of the armies of the period, namely the need to train troops.

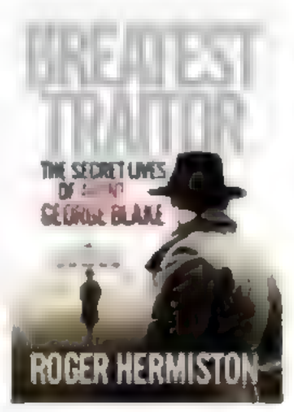
Harding considers the different types and kind of shot (I found the concept of 'plug', 'bobbin', and 'dumb-bell' shot particularly intriguing), how they were fired, and the effect that impact on a variety of surfaces had on them. This type of analysis enables the shot to be read, and in doing so, unlocks the secrets of the musket ball.

Rarely can a book be considered the definitive work on a subject. Harding's book lands firmly in that category. It is, of course, a specialist study, and will have limited appeal to the more general reader. But for serious students of the Civil Wars with an interest in battlefield archaeology, collecting arms and armour, metal-detecting, or even re-enactment, this would be a very useful addition to your library.

*David Flintham*

## The Greatest Traitor: the secret lives of Agent George Blake

**Roger Hermiston**
Aurum Press, £20.00
ISBN 978-1781310465




Philby, Burgess, and Maclean are household names in the world of Cold War dirty-dealing. George Blake was a less well-known yet equally notorious double-agent. So hats off to Roger Hermiston for bringing to life the exploits of this Second World War resistance fighter turned Soviet agent.

Born George Behar (the family later Anglicised their name by deed poll) of Sephardic Jewish background, Blake risked his life with the Dutch underground, and later fled across Nazi-occupied Europe into the arms of British Intelligence, arriving in London in 1943. Less than a decade after the war ended, he was hailed as a rising star in the Secret Intelligence Service (SIS). By 1951 he was actively betraying his adopted country.

In 1955, Blake was thrust into the very heart of Cold War espionage as an SIS agent in Berlin, where 'it seemed as if everyone was a spy, and the spies were spying for everyone'. Blake was no exception. He would routinely slip across to East Berlin to pass Minox film of SIS documents to his KGB handlers.

Six years later he found himself facing SIS interrogators in London. Blake confessed his treachery, and in that same year he was hauled before the Old Bailey, where he was handed an unprecedented 42-year sentence. But he did not linger too long in jail. Three years later, Blake scaled the wall at Wormwood Scrubs and made off to Russia, where he remains to this day. The jail-break threw Harold Wilson's government into turmoil until SIS gave assurances that the escape did not pose a national security risk.

Hermiston spins a yarn of high adventure, of a life ennobled by wartime valour only to be laid low by the twisted belief in the means justifying the end, even if this meant betrayal of one's own country. The author makes no attempt to glamorise the life of a man who, after all is said and done, put himself into the pocket of an evil and repressive regime. 'Whatever motives first drove his loyalties to switch, once these had done so, Blake was a calculating, conscientious, and quite unrepentant traitor.'

*Jules Stewart*

# DOWNLOAD THE *MHM* DIGITAL EDITION

*Military History Monthly* is now available as a digital edition which can be downloaded to your **PC**, **Mac** or **iPad**.

The Digital Edition is packed with all the in-depth history, real-life stories, fascinating battle reports, and practical advice you would expect from *Military History Monthly* magazine, but in a completely new format.

**SAVE MONEY**

Up to **47% off** an annual subscription when you go digital.

**DOWNLOAD ANYWHERE, READ ANYWHERE**

Store our entire back catalogue on one device, and access from anywhere around the world.

**ONE SUBSCRIPTION, MULTIPLE FORMATS**

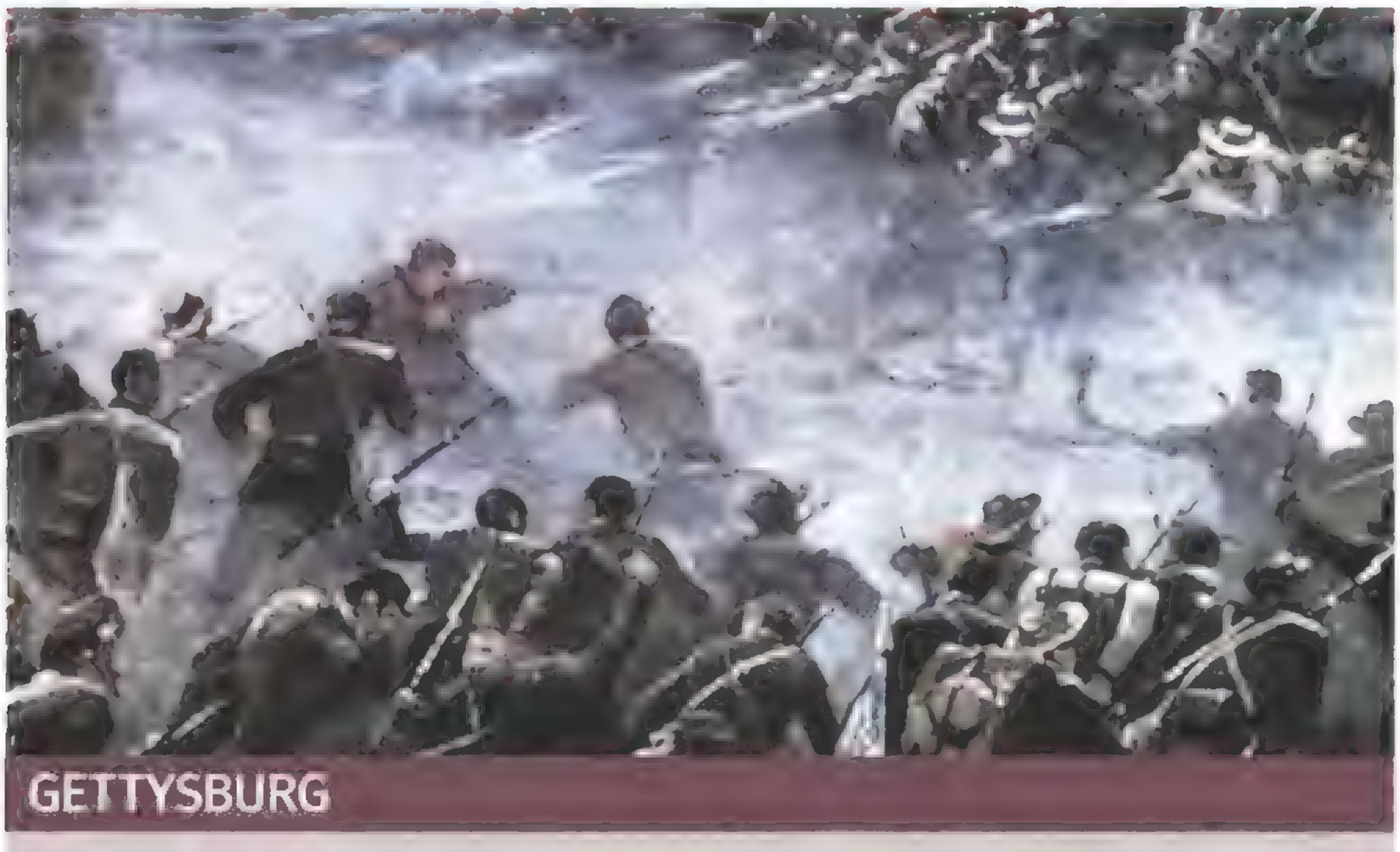
One subscription to *Military History Monthly* can be read across many platforms, including home computers and handheld devices such as the iPad.

**ADJUSTABLE FONT SIZE FOR EASY VIEWING**

Makes reading easy by allowing you to zoom further into pages, and to customise your viewing experience.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION VISIT:
## www.military-history.org/digital

# COMING SOON IN MILITARY HISTORY MONTHLY



## GETTYSBURG

**Julian Brazier** marks the 150th anniversary of the greatest battle ever fought in the Western Hemisphere with the launch of a four-part mini series.

## PLUS all of your regulars:

- News
- Letters
- Your Military History
- War Culture
- Museum
- War on Film
- Behind the Image
- Reviews
- Back to the Drawing Board

## CAEN, 1944

The British Army returns to the Continent to find itself fighting a relentless attritional battle to break the German line in Normandy.

## LUDENDORFF

**Graham Goodlad** assesses the generalship of Germany's military mastermind during the First World War.

## FRONTLINE: Malplaquet

Our new series on the combat experience through history continues with a firsthand description of massed musketry in Marlborough's wars.

## THE BATTLE OF THE ATLANTIC: The Tide Turns

We explore the pivotal maritime battle to beat the U-boats in May 1943.

Reserve your copy with your newsagent, or see our fantastic **subscription offer** on page 38

**VISIT**
***www.military-history.org***
for competitions, articles and more...

**For up-to-the-minute news and info, add us:**

www.facebook.com/militaryhistorymonthly

twitter.com/milhistmonthly

# THE NEXT ISSUE IS ON SALE
# 9 MAY 2013

# MEDAL NEWS

*For the History of Heroes*

**The UK's only magazine devoted to battles & medals!**

- News & Views
- Market Scene
- Informative Articles
- On Parade
- Bookshelf
- Letters to the editor
- Medal Tracker
- Dealers Lists
- Diary of events
- Classified advertising and much, much more!

## FOR YOUR **FREE** SAMPLE COPY

log on to www.tokenpublishing.com

Write to: Token Publishing Ltd, Orchard House, Duchy Road, Heathpark, Honiton, Devon, EX14 1YD

or call 01404 46972

## Medal Yearbook 2013

The full price guide and collectors handbook to British and Commonwealth Medals, Available now for just £19.95 + £4.00 p&p

Token PUBLISHING

# COMPETITION

MILITARY HISTORY MONTHLY

## 3 This month we have 3 BOOK'S and 3 DVD'S to be won!

Winston Churchill immortalised the fighter pilots who won the Battle of Britain as 'The Few'. But behind them was another group of people, even fewer in number, whose work was too secret to acknowledge.

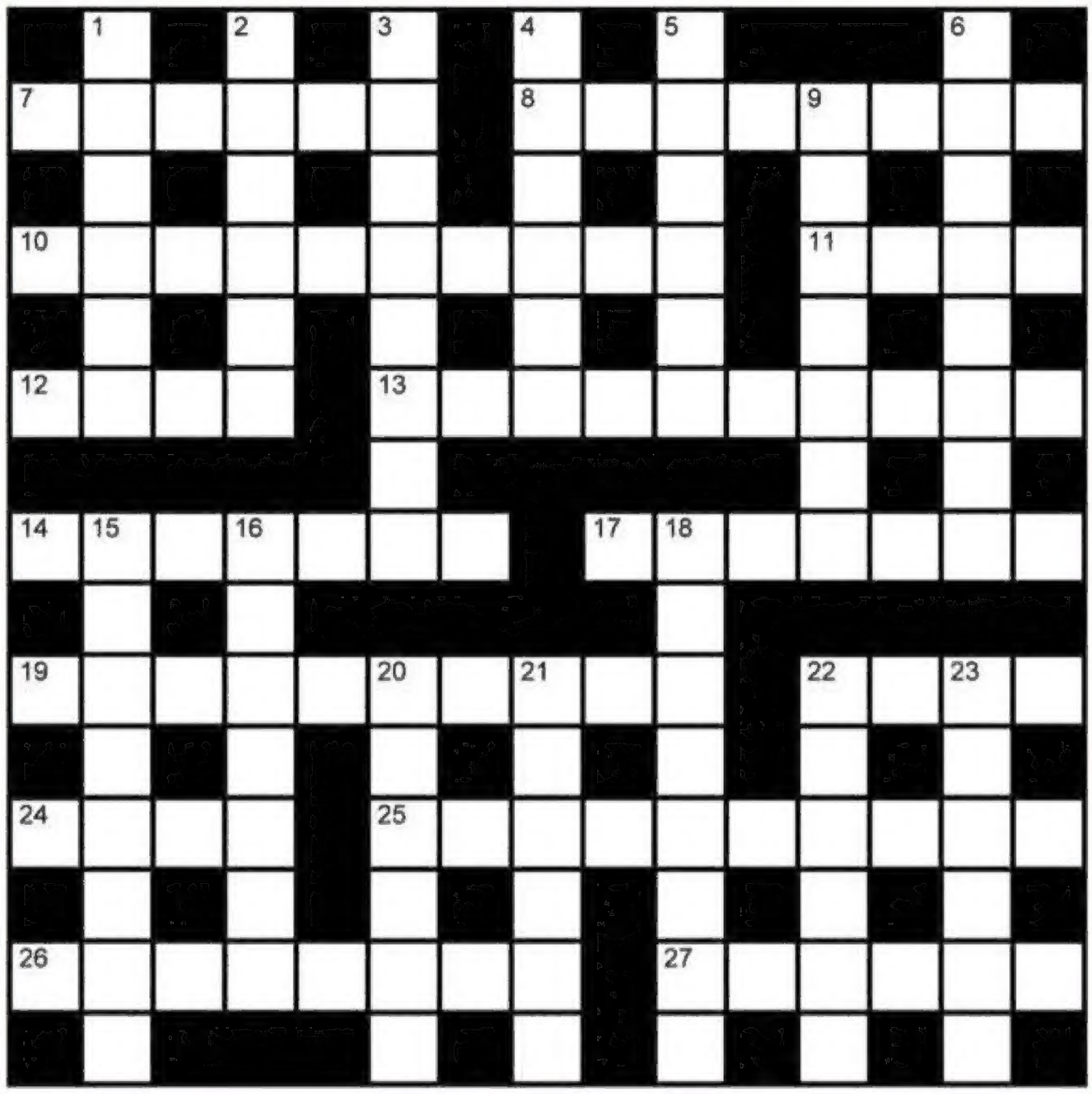
After joining the Women's Auxiliary Air Force (WAAF) at just eighteen years of age, Eileen Younghusband was thrust into a world at war. As an invaluable part of the Radar chain, Eileen and her fellow WAAF officers plotted the devastating V1 rockets during the Blitz. On 8 September 1944 Eileen raised the first alarm for a V2 rocket, codenamed 'Big Ben' which landed on Chiswick. During a rare respite, Eileen married, only to be posted in Belgium six weeks later where her mission was to track down the V2 launch sites. Before being demobilised she was employed as a 'guide' around the liberated concentration camp known as the 'Camp of Silence and Death', Fort Breendonk.

At ninety-one years of age, Eileen takes you on fascinating and inspiring journey that will appeal to an extremely wide demographic.

To be in with a chance of winning a DVD and a book of *One Woman's War*, simply visit ***www.military-history.org*** and answer the following questions:

1. In which year was the WAAF established?
2. In which country is Fort Breendonk located?
3. How old was Eileen when she joined the WAAF?

**TO ENTER THE QUIZ** go to *www.military-history.org*



## *MHM* CROSSWORD

Test your military history knowledge in our regular crossword.
The answers will be revealed in next month's issue of *MHM*.

### ACROSS

**7** Former region of Yugoslavia where NATO troops were deployed in 1995 (6)
**8** Scottish city near to which the Covenanters were defeated by Montrose's Royalist army in September 1644 (8)
**10** Battle of the War of the Spanish Succession (10)
**11** High-ranking Nazi who flew alone to Scotland in May 1941 (4)
**12** NATO code name for the Russian Tupolev Tu-95 bomber (4)
**13** English author, a naval intelligence officer during the Second World War (3,7)
**14** Unit of artillery comprising guns, personnel and vehicles (7)
**17** Ancient kingdom of Mesopotamia, which achieved its greatest territorial expansion in the 7th century BC (7)
**19** Commander of British forces during the Zulu War until his replacement by Wolseley (10)
**22** ___ Point, location of the United States Military Academy (4)
**24** Battle of the Crimean War (4)
**25** Jonathan ___, US general awarded the Medal of Honor for his attempt to prevent the Phillipines falling to Japan (10)
**26** City in which the Indian Army headquarters are located (3,5)
**27** Unit of a Roman legion (6)

### DOWN

**1** Originally an Algerian light infantryman in the French army with characteristic flamboyant uniform (6)
**2** Marksman shooting at the enemy from a concealed position (6)
**3** Opponent of a Roundhead (8)
**4** Third rate ship of the Royal Navy, present at the Battle of Copenhagen (6)
**5** German field marshal, executed for war crimes in 1946 (6)
**6** City bombed by the Soviet Air Force on three separate nights in February 1944 (8)
**9** African kingdom which surrendered to France after the Battle of Cana in November 1894 (7)
**15** Admiral Rodney's flagship when in command of a squadron bombarding Le Havre in 1759 (8)
**16** French marshal captured at the Battle of Blenheim (7)
**18** John ___, Union general, commander of the Army of the Potomac, killed by a Confederate sharpshooter in 1864 (8)
**20** Cecil Harold ___, awarded the Victoria Cross posthumously for action at Fremicourt in 1918 (6)
**21** Odin class submarine built by Vickers Amstrong in 1928 (6)
**22** Ambrose ___, Confederate general, wounded at Antietam and Chancellorsville (6)
**23** Desert in which an RAF Kittyhawk was found in 2012, seventy years after it had crashed (6)

## WHAT DO YOU THINK?

Now you can have your opinions on everything *MHM* heard online as well as in print. Follow us on **Twitter@MilHistMonthly**, or take a look at our Facebook page for daily news, books, and article updates at **www.facebook.com/MilitaryHistoryMonthly**.

Think you have spotted an error? Disagree with a viewpoint? Enjoying the mag? Visit **www.military-history.org** to post your comments on a wide range of different articles. Alternatively send an email to *feedback@military-history.org*.

**ADD US NOW** and have your say

## CAPTION COMPETITION

We continue our online caption competition with an image from our article on Egypt's Missiles. Pit your wit against *MHM* readers at **www.military-history.org/competitions**.

WINNER:

The Government spending review forces the Army Air Corps to find cheaper ways to keep flying.
**David Flintham**

RUNNERS-UP:

You alright there love. Just practising our swinging movements
**Liam Davis**

The unofficial poster of the 1966 movie:"What Did You Do In The War, Daddy?"
**Joe Agius**

**Think you can do better?**

Log onto ***www.military-history.org/competitions*** to enter the next CAPTION COMPETITION. Flex your funny bone and be in with a chance of getting your caption published in the next issue of *Military History Monthly*!

**ANSWERS** **APRIL ISSUE | MHM31**

**ACROSS** 1 Centurion, 6 Alvis, 9 Tommy, 10 Observers, 11 Largs, 12 Irish, 13 Tye, 14 Nicosia, 16 Tomcat, 18 Quatre, 21 Cornets, 24 RFC, 25 Mower, 26 Sabre, 28 Olive Drab, 29 Braga, 30 Delft, 31 Squadrons. **DOWN** 1 Catalina, 2 Namur, 3 Ulysses, 4 Iwo Jima, 5 Nesbitt, 6 Abraham, 7 Vientiane, 8 Sussex, 15 Churchill, 17 Assegais, 19 Tempest, 20 Edwards, 21 Caribou, 22 Rosebud, 23 Arnold, 27 Bravo.

# Dreyse Needle Gun

**Above** A Prussian Dreyse Needle Gun from the Armémuseum in Stockholm.

Introduced by the Prussian Army in the mid-19th century, the Dreyse Needle Gun was a revolutionary breach-loading rifle, which proved decisive in its victory over the Austrians in 1866. However, when the Prussians marched into France four years later, they faced soldiers who were equipped with the Chassepot rifle, and the limitations of the Dreyse gun became clear.

Invented by the German gunsmith Johann Nicolaus von Dreyse in 1836, the needle gun was innovative in several respects. Until then, rifles were muzzle-loaded – a procedure that involved ramming a cartridge down the barrel with a metal ramrod, a procedure that had to be performed while standing.

Although there had been various experiments with breech-loading muskets since the 18th century, von Dreyse developed a bolt action for opening and closing the rear of the barrel. Into the breech was placed a paper cartridge. When the trigger was pulled, a needle-like firing pin penetrated the paper cartridge and struck a percussion cap, firing the bullet. Hence the gun's name.

> After several shots had been fired, hot gas escaped, burning the rifleman's face.

The Prussian military recognised that this would give their infantry two major advantages: the Dreyse gun could be reloaded while kneeling or even lying down, making the firer less of a target than an opponent with a traditional muzzle-loader. Better still, using a bolt action to open and close the chamber significantly increased the rate of fire, in some instances by a ratio of five to one.

In the hands of well-trained and highly disciplined troops such as the Prussians, the Dreyse gun proved devastating. At the Battle of Königgrätz in 1866, the Prussian rate of fire overwhelmed the numerically superior Austrians at a crucial point in the engagement.

However, the benefits of the Dreyse gun came at a price. Its effective range was just 600m (at best), compared to 1,000 metres for the muzzle-loaded Austrian Lorenz rifle. The lack of an effective seal around the breech meant that hot gas escaped after several shots had been fired, burning the rifleman's face while aiming from the shoulder, and forcing him to shoot from the hip, greatly reducing accuracy.

While the Prussians were fighting their Austrian neighbours, the French had been busily rearming with the Chassepot rifle. Like the Dreyse gun, it was loaded with bolt action. But its breech was sealed by a rubber obduration ring, preventing hot gas from escaping. This, combined with a smaller calibre (11mm compared to 15mm), increased the Chassepot's velocity, giving an effective range of more than 1,000 metres.

When the Prussians faced the French infantry at the Battle of Gravelotte in 1870, they found themselves completely outgunned, suffering more that 20,000 killed or wounded compared to fewer than 8,000 on the French side (most of them to artillery fire). Unfortunately for the French, the Chassepot did not give them a decisive advantage in the face of Prussian organisation, tactics, and artillery – but it signalled the end of the line for the Dreyse gun.

Following the French surrender in 1871, the Prussians and their German allies (with the exception of Bavaria) were re-equipped with the Mauser Model 71, a bolt-action rifle that fired 11mm cartridges and had a maximum range of 2,000 metres. Like so many game-changing innovations, the Dreyse Needle Gun quickly became outmoded as competitors ironed out the creases in its design.

**Below** The unveiling of the Dreyse Memorial in Sömmerda, 1909.

# The Western Front Association

founded 1980

# the Great War 1914-18: understood

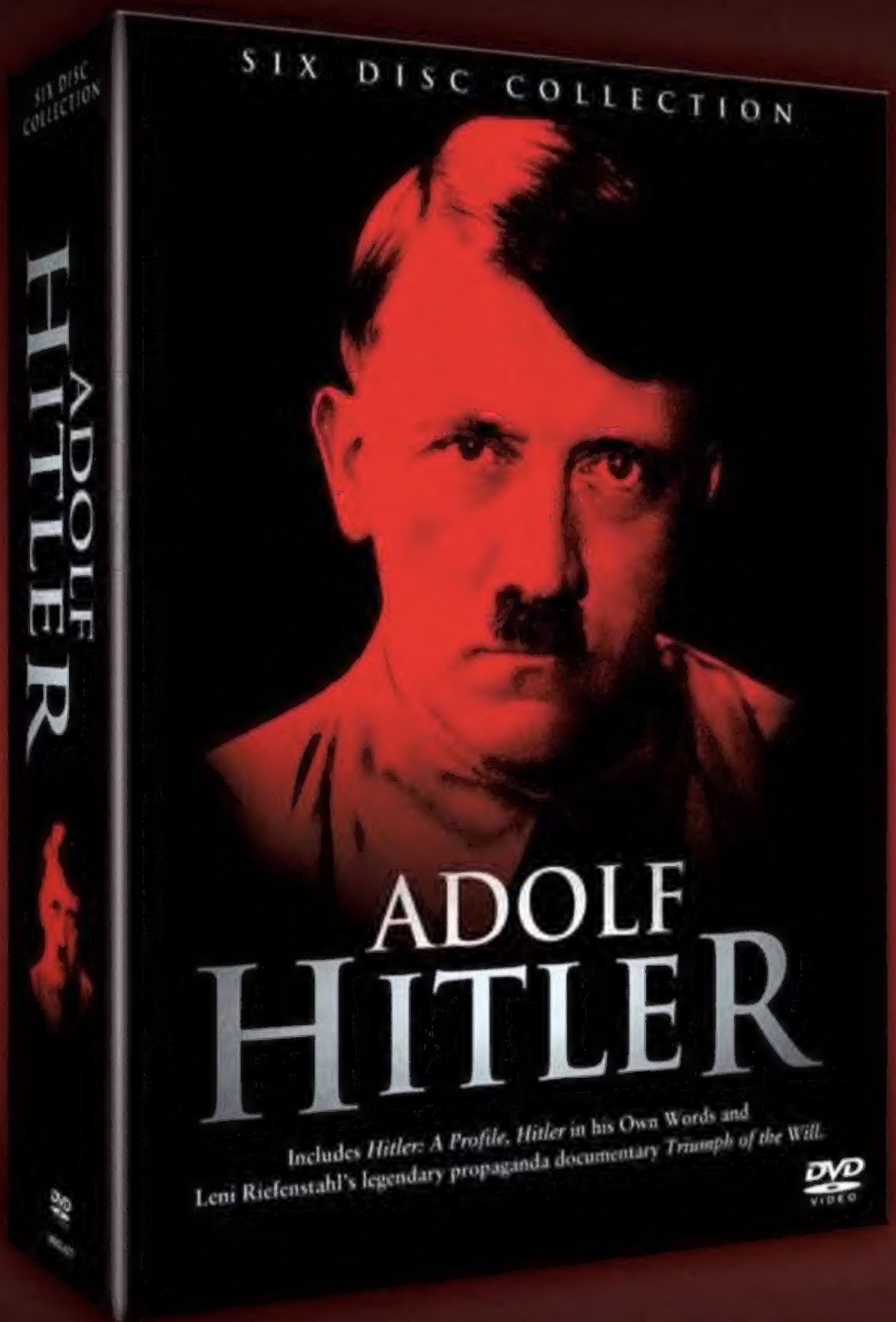
The First Battle of Ypres - one of four battles to wage around the city - was a costly bloodletting for both sides. At the end, the BEF had lost many of its seasoned regulars. And by the end of 1914, the combatant nations were only just beginning to come to terms with a new form of warfare - a war of trenches, of artillery, and of mass slaughter.

The Great War is a fascinating subject, with a complex blend of military, social, science, political and economic history. To understand much more about the 1914-18 period, and to appreciate the contexts in which the four Battles of Ypres were fought, **join us at The Western Front Association.**

The Western Front Association
understanding the Great War 1914-18: explore | learn | share
www.westernfrontassociation.com
The Western Front Association is a registered charity no 298365

# ADOLF HITLER

An in-depth look at history's most infamous leader


SIX DISC COLLECTION
ADOLF HITLER
Includes Hitler: A Profile, Hitler in his Own Words and
Leni Riefenstahl's legendary propaganda documentary Triumph of the Will.
DVD VIDEO

## Available For The First Time Ever As A 6 DVD Complete Collection

**INCLUDES BONUS DISC:**
**'Triumph Of The Will'**
Riefenstahl's masterpiece documenting the Nuremberg Party Rally

**ALSO AVAILABLE**
HITLER'S HENCHMEN
VOLUMES ONE & TWO

## BUY NOW

amazon.co.uk

Free Super Saver Delivery and Unlimited One-Day Delivery with Amazon Prime are available.
Terms and Conditions apply. See Amazon.co.uk for details.

GO ENTERTAIN

Follow us @goentertainuk for news on all our latest releases

Visit our website at **www.goentertain.tv** www.facebook.com/goentertain

Find more issues at
magazinesdownload.com